JULY
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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Velvet Johnnie Went to Prison
by PETER CHEYNEY

The Invisible Murderer
by CARTER DICKSON

The Code of the Rat
by GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

The Banana Herder
by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

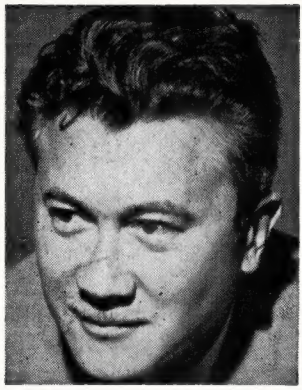
Death in New Guinea
by MYRON DAVID ORR

THE MAN WHO WAS CLEVER

A Complete Saint Novelet by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



MUCH AS IT PAINS ME to admit that everybody does not think that every Saint story is a masterpiece, it is a solemn if slightly incredible fact that I occasionally receive a letter which accuses me of having laid an egg.

Usually I take a philosophical view of these aspersions, consoling myself with the Lincolnesque reflection that you can't please all the customers all the time. And I seldom answer such letters, figuring that anyone who paid for the merchandise is entitled to his squawk, and also that you can't make a reader like a story by arguing with him about it anyhow.

But of recent years there has been one comment repeated often enough to get under my skin and finally goad me into talking back. This one says, more or less: "I've loved the Saint stories for years—I grew up with them—but lately he doesn't seem the same. Why can't you write like you used to in the old days?"

The answer is simple: Because I started writing Saint stories almost 30 years ago, when I was a very callow youth indeed. If I haven't learned anything about life, character, style, and technique, with all those years and all that practice, I should have my typewriter taken away. I couldn't write as crudely as I did then, today, if I tried.

Oh, sure, I had some talent, and all kinds of confidence and undisciplined zest. But you, dear sir or madam, who "grew up with the Saint": weren't you a lot younger too?

I sincerely submit that the reason those old stories seem so much better is because you recall them through the rosy glow which tints so many youthful memories. Like those of Mama's cooking, which probably wasn't really so fabulous, but your appetite was.

In an attempt to prove this, I am brazenly reprinting this month THE MAN WHO WAS CLEVER, which is the first Saint novelet I ever wrote, Even after cutting (unavoidable because of length) and editing some of its most embarrassing passages, I still can't read it without squirming a little. But it will be worth it if it disposes once and for all of that sentimental yearning for those good old days. In fact, I dare you to like it.

And after shuddering off your nostalgic nausea, you can turn to some really good stuff by Carter Dickson, Lawrence Blochman, Myron David Orr, Peter Cheyney, and especially George Fielding Eliot with his brand new CODE OF THE RAT—and it shouldn't seem such a bad month after all.

Leslie Charteris

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I am sincerely interested in knowing more about this unseen, vital power which can be used in acquiring the fullness and happiness of life. Please send me, without cost, the book, "The Mastery of Life," which tells how to receive this information.

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THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, Vol. 6, No. 1. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign Postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y.
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Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. B-100, Belton Hearing Aid Co., 1227 Loyola Avenue, Chicago 26, Illinois.

the man who was clever

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Hayn was a gambler-killer by instinct. But each of London's four corners held an ace adorned with an odd little stick figure.

MR. "SNAKE" GANNING was a tall, incredibly thin man, with sallow features and black hair that was invariably oiled and brushed to a shiny sleekness. His head was small and round, and he carried it thrust forward to the full stretch of his long neck. Taking into the combination of physical characteristics the sinuous carriage of his body, the glittering beadiness of his expressionless black eyes, and the silent litheness with which he moved, it was easy to appreciate the aptness of his nickname.

He was the leader of a particularly tough race-course gang generally known as "The Snake's Boys," which subsisted in unmerited luxury on the proceeds of blackmailing bookmakers under the threat of doing them grievous bodily harm. There were also a number of other unsavory things about him which may be revealed in due course.

The actual motive for the interference of the Saint in the affairs of the Snake and his boys was their treatment of Tommy Mitre on the occasion of his first venture into Turf finance.

Tommy ought to have known

IN AN EPISODE FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS OF HIS CAREER, THE SAINT STAMPS HIS HALO ON THE WRECK OF AN UGLY RACKET

From ENTER THE SAINT, published by Doubleday & Co., Inc.
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better, for the methods of the Snake had never been a secret in racing circles. Tommy was like that—stubborn. He told the Snake exactly where he could go, and as a result Tommy Mitre was soundly beaten up by the Snake's Boys when he was leaving the course, and his capital and his day's profits were taken. And it so happened that Simon Templar had elected to enjoy a day's racing at Brighton, and had observed the beating-up from a distance.

Snake Ganning and a select committee of the Boys spent the evening in Brighton, celebrating, and left for London by a late train. As did Simon Templar.

To impress them at the start the Saint had a gold cigarette case and a large wad of bank notes. In his innocent way, he counted over his pile before their very eyes, announced the total at two hundred and fifty pounds, and invited them to congratulate him on his luck. They congratulated him, politely. They remarked on the slowness of the train, and Simon agreed that it was a boring journey. He said he wished there was some sort of entertainment provided by the railway company for the diversion of passengers on boring journeys. Somebody produced a pack of cards. . . .

The game selected was poker. The Saint apologetically warned them that he had only played poker once before in his life, but they said kindly that that didn't matter a bit.

The fight started just five minutes before the train reached London and the porters who helped the Snake and his Boys out of the compartment were not thanked. They gave the Boys a bucket of water with which to revive the Snake himself, but they couldn't do anything about his two black eyes or his missing front teeth.

II

THE SAINT, being a man of decidedly luxurious tastes, was the tenant of a flat in Brook Street, Mayfair. The locality had one distinct advantage that had nothing to do with the prestige of its address; and this advantage was the fact that it possessed a very small and exclusive mews, situated at a distance of less than the throw of a small stone from the Saint's front door. In this mews were a number of very expensive garages, large, small, and of M. G. size.

And the Saint owned two of these large garages. In one he kept his own car. The other had been empty for a week, until he had begun smuggling an assortment of curious objects into it at dead of night—objects which only by the most frantic stretch of imagination could have been associated with cars.

If the Saint had been observed on any of these surreptitious trips, it is highly probable that his sanity would have been doubted. Not that he would have cared; for he had his own reasons for his apparent eccentricity. But as it was, no one noticed his goings-out or his comings-in, and there was no comment.

And even if he had been noticed, it is very doubtful if he would have been recognized. It was the immaculate Saint who left Brook Street and drove to Chelsea and garaged his car near Fulham Road. Then by a very subtle change of carriage, it was a not-nearly-so-immaculate Saint who walked through a maze of dingy streets to a house in which one Bertie Marks, a bird of passage, had a stuffy and microscopical apartment.

It was a shabby, slouching, down-at-heel Bertie Marks who left the apartment and returned to the West End on the plebian bus, laden with the packages that he had purchased on his way; and who shambled inconspicuously into the mews off Brook Street and into the garage which he held in his own name. The Saint did not believe in being unnecessarily careless about details.

All these elaborate preparations—the taking of the second garage and the Chelsea apartment, and the creation of the character of Bertie Marks—had been made for one single purpose, which was put into execution on a certain day.

A few hours after dawn on that day, a small van bearing the name of Carter Paterson turned into the mews and stopped there. Bertie Marks climbed down from the driver's seat, wiping grimy hands on his corduroys, and fished out a key, with which he opened the door of his garage. Then he went back to his van, drove it into the garage, and closed the doors behind him.

He knew that his action must have excited the curiosity of the car-washing parade of chauffeurs congregated in the mews, but he wasn't bothering about that. With the consummation of his plan, the necessity for the continued existence of Bertie Marks was rapidly nearing its end.

"Let 'em wonder!" thought the Saint carelessly, as he peeled off his grubby jacket.

The Saint gently slid a bar across the door to shut out any inquisitive explorers, and got to work.

The van, on being opened, disclosed a number of large wooden packing cases which the Saint proceeded to unload on to the floor of the garage. This done, he fetched from a corner a mallet and chisel, and began to pry open the cases and extract their contents. In each case, packed in with wooden shavings, were two dozen china jars.

As each case was emptied, the Saint carried the jars over to the light and inspected them minutely. He was not at all surprised to find that, whereas the majority of the jars were perfectly plain, all the jars in one case were marked with a tiny cross in the glazing. These jars the Saint set aside, for they were the only ones in which he was interested. They were exactly what he had expected to find, and they provided his entire motive for the temporary and occasional sinking of his own personality in the *alias* of Mr. Marks. The other jars he replaced in their respective cases, and carefully closed and roped them to look as they had been before he tampered with them.

Then he opened the marked jars and poured out their contents into a bucket. In another corner of the garage was a pile of little tins, and in each jar the Saint placed one of these tins, padding the space that was left with cotton-wool to prevent rattling. The jars so treated were replaced one by one and the case in its turn was also nailed up again and roped as before—after the Saint, with a little smile plucking at the corners of his mouth, had carefully laid a souvenir of his intervention on the top of the last layer of wood shavings.

He had worked quickly. Only an hour and a half had elapsed from the time when he drove into the garage to the time when he lifted the last case back into the van. When that had been done he unbarred the garage doors and opened them wide.

The remains of the car washing parade looked up puzzledly as the van came backing out of the garage; it registered an even greater perplexity when the van proceeded to drive out of the mews and vanish in the direction of Bond Street. Very few people ever saw Mr. Bertie Marks again.

The van drove to an address in the West End, and there Mr. Marks delivered the cases, secured a signature to a receipt, and departed, heading further west. On his way, he stopped at St. George's Hospital where he left his bucket. The man who took charge of it was puzzled, but Mr. Marks was in a hurry and had neither time nor the inclination to enlighten him.

"Take great care of it, because it's worth more money than you'll ever have," he directed. "See that it gets to one of the doctors, and give him this note with it." And the Saint went back to the wheel of his van and drove away, feeling that he was nearing the end of an excellent day's work.

He drove to the Great West Road, and out of London towards Maidenhead. Somewhere along that road he turned off into a side lane, and there he stopped for a few minutes out of sight of

the main traffic. Inside the van was a large pot of paint, and the Saint used it energetically. Under his vigorous wielding of the brush, the sign of Carter Paterson, which he had been at some pains to execute artistically the night before, vanished entirely; and the van became plain.

Satisfied with the obliteration of the handiwork which only a few hours before he had admired so much, the Saint resumed the wheel and drove back to London. The paint he had used was guaranteed quick-drying, and it lived up to the word of its guarantee. It collected a good deal of dust on the return voyage, and duly dried with a somewhat soiled aspect which was a very fair imitation of the condition in which Mr. Marks had received it originally.

He delivered it to its home garage at Shepherd's Bush and paid twenty-four hours' hire. Some time later Mr. Marks returned to Chelsea. A little later still, the not-so-immaculate Simon Templar turned into another garage and collected his trim blue speedster, in which he drove to his club in Dover Street. And the Simon Templar who sauntered through to the bar and called for a pint of beer must have been one of the most impeccably immaculate young men that that haunt of impeccably young men had ever sheltered.

"We don't often see you as early as this, sir," remarked the barman.

"May it be as many years before you see me as early as this again, son," answered the Saint piously. "But this morning I felt I just had to get up and go for a drive. It was such a beautiful morning."

III

MR. EDGAR HAYN was a man of many interests. He was the proud proprietor of "Danny's," a night club in a squalid street off Shaftesbury Avenue, and he also controlled the destinies of the firm of Laserre, which was a small but expensive shop in Regent Street that retailed perfumes, powders, rouges, creams, and all the other preparations essential to modern feminine face-repair.

He was writing letters at the big knee-hole desk in his private office at "Danny's" when Ganning arrived. The knock on the door did not make him look up. He said, "Come in!"—but the sound of the opening and closing of the door was, to him, sufficient indication that the order had been obeyed; and he went on to finish the letter he had been drafting.

Only when that was done did he condescend to notice the presence of his visitor. "You're late, Snake," he said, blotting the sheet carefully.

"Sorry, boss."

Mr. Hayn screwed the cap on his fountain pen, replaced it in his pocket, and raised his eyes from the desk for the first time. What he saw made him sag back with astonishment. "Who on earth have you been picking a quarrel with?" he said.

The Snake certainly looked for the worse for wear. A bandage around his head covered one eye, and the eye that was visible was nearly closed up. His lips were bruised and swollen, and a distinct lack of teeth made him speak with a painful lisp.

"Was it Harrigan's crowd?" said Hayn.

"A bloke we met on the train coming back from Brighton last night."

"Were you alone?"

"Nope: Ted and Bill were with me. And Mario."

"And what was this man trooping round? A regiment?"

"He was alone."

Hayn blinked. "How did it happen?"

"We thought he was a sucker," said Snake disgustedly. Up-to-the-minute clothes, gold cigarette case, gold watch—and a big roll of bills. Two-fifty, he said it was. We couldn't let that go, so we got him into a game of cards—poker.

Mr. Hayn controlled his features. "And then you cut up rough, and got the worst of it?"

"I accused him of cheating. He didn't deny it. He had the nerve to say: "Well, you were supposed to be teaching me the game, and I saw you were cheating all the time, so I thought it was allowed by the rules! And he started putting away our pile. Of course we cut up rough!"

"And he cut up rougher?" said Mr. Hayn.

"He didn't fight fair," said Ganning aggrievedly. The Snake seemed disinclined to proceed further with the description of the battle, and Hayn tactfully refrained from pressing him. He allowed the Snake to brood blackly over the memory for a few moments.

"He wasn't an amateur," said Ganning. "But none of us could place him. I'd give a hell of a lot to find out who he was. One of these fly mobsters you read about, I shouldn't wonder. He'd got all the dope. Look at this," said the Snake, producing the envelope. "He shoved that at Ted when he got out. Said it was his receipt."

Hayn slipped the sheet of paper out of the envelope and spread it out on his desk. Probably he had not fully grasped the purport of Ganning's description, for the effect the sight had on him was amazing. Hayn's pink face suddenly turned white.

"What's it mean to you, boss?" asked the bewildered Ganning.

"This morning we got a consignment over from Germany," Hayn said, speaking almost in

a whisper. "When Braddon opened the case, there was the same picture on top of the packing. We couldn't figure out how it came there."

"Have you looked the stuff over yet?" said the Snake, instantly alert.

Hayn shook his head. He was still staring, as though hypnotized, at the scrap of paper.

"We didn't think anything of it. There's never been a hitch yet. Braddon thought the men who packed the case must have been playing some game. We just put the marked jars away in the usual place." Hayn reached out a shaky hand for the telephone, while Ganning sat silently chewing over the startling possibilities that were revealed by this information.

"Hullo . . . Regent nine double-o four seven . . . please." Hayn fidgeted nervously as he waited for the call to be put through. It came after what seemed an eternity. "Hullo . . . That you, Braddon? . . . I want you to get out the marked jars that came over in the case with the paper in—you remember? Never mind why!"

A minute later Hayn clicked the receiver back and slewed his swivel chair round so that he faced Snake Ganning.

"What's he say?" asked the Snake.

"There's just a tin of insecticide in each," Hayn replied. "I asked him how he knew what it was, and he said the whole tin was there, label and all, packed in with cotton-wool to make it fit. There was ten thousand pounds' worth of snow in that shipping, and this guy has lifted the lot!"

IV

"FINISH YOUR beer, son," said Simon Templar, stretched out in the armchair. "And then you may start right in and tell me the story of your life. I can spare you about ten minutes."

Jerry Stannard put down his glass with a sigh and settled back at his ease, while the Saint made a long arm for the cigarette box.

"I can't make out yet why you should have interested yourself in me," said Stannard.

"That's my affair," said the Saint bluntly. "And if it comes to that, I'm not a philanthropic institution. I propose to make use of you. Not that I won't get anything out of it. I'm sufficiently interested in you to want to help you, but you're going to pay your way."

Stannard nodded. "It's decent of you to think I'm worth it," he said.

He had not forgotten—it would have been impossible to forget such an incident in two days—the occasion of his first meeting with the Saint. Stannard had been entrusted with a

small packet which he had been told to take to an address in Piccadilly; and even if he had not been told what the packet contained, he could not have helped having a shrewd idea. And, therefore, when a heavy hand had fallen suddenly only a few minutes after he had left Mr. Hayn, he had had no hope.

And then the miracle had happened, although he did not realize at the time that it was a miracle. A man had brushed against him as the detective turned to hail a taxi, and the man had turned to apologize. In that crisis, all Stannard's faculties had been keyed up to the vivid supersensitiveness which comes just before breaking point; and that abnormal acuteness had combined with the peculiarly keen stare which had accompanied the stranger's apology, so that the stranger's face was indelibly engraved on Stannard's memory.

The Saint took a little package from his pocket, and weighed it reflectively in his hand.

"Forty-eight hours ago," he murmured, "you assumed, quite rightly, that you were booked for five year's penal servitude. Instead of that, you're a free man. The triumphant sleuths of Vine Street found nothing on you, and had to release you with apologies. I expect you're still wondering what's going to be my price for having picked your pocket in the nick of time."

"I've been wondering ever since."

"I'm just going to tell you," said the Saint. "But first we'll get rid of this."

He left the room with the packet, and through the open door came the sound of running water. In a few minutes he was back, dusting his hands.

"That disposes of the evidence," he said. "Now I want you to tell me something. How did you get into this dope game?"

Stannard shrugged. "You may as well know. There's no heroic or clever reason. It's just because I'm a waster. I was in the wrong set at Cambridge. Then my father died and left me without a bean. I tried to get a job, but I couldn't do anything useful. And all the time, naturally, I was mixing with the same bad bunch. Eventually they roped me in. I suppose I ought to have fought against it, but I just hadn't the guts. It was easy money, and I took it. That's all."

There was a short silence, during which the Saint blew monotonously regular smoke rings toward the ceiling.

"Now I'll tell you something," Simon said. "I've made all the inquiries I need to make about you. I know your family history for two generations back, your early life, your school record—everything. I know enough to judge that you don't belong where you are now. For one thing, I know

you're engaged to a rather nice girl, and she's worried about you. She doesn't know anything, but she suspects. And you're worried. You're not as quiet and comfortable in this crime racket as you'd like to make out. You weren't cut out for a bad man. Isn't that true?"

"Yes," Stannard said flatly. "I'd give anything to be out of it."

"And you're straight about this girl—Gwen Chandler?"

"Straight as a die. Honest, Templar! But what can I do? If I drop Hayn's crowd, I shan't have a cent. Besides, I don't know that they'd let me drop out. I owe money. When I was at Cambridge, I lost a small fortune—for me—in Hayn's gambling rooms, and he's got I. O. U.'s of mine for close on a thousand. I've been extravagant—I've run up bills everywhere. You can't imagine how badly in the cart I am!"

"On the contrary," said the Saint calmly, "I've a very good guess about that. That's why you're here now. I wanted an agent inside Hayn's gang, and I ran through the whole deck before I chose you.

"I'm going to trust you. I'm going to take you in with me for this campaign. I'll get you enough out of it to square off your debts, and at the end of it you'll be working for me. And you'll give me your word of honor that you'll go straight for the rest of your life. That's my offer. What about it?"

The Saint leaned against the mantelpiece languidly enough, but there had been nothing languid about his crisp incisive sentences. Thinking it over afterwards, it seemed to Stannard that the whole thing had been done in a few minutes, and he was left to marvel at the extraordinary force of personality which in such a short time could override the prejudice of years and rekindle a spark of decency that had been as good as dead. But at that instant, he could not analyze his feelings.

Stannard got to his feet. "There's only one answer," he said, and held out his hand.

The Saint took it in a firm grip. "From now on, I want you to keep away from me till I give you the all-clear," he said. "If the Snake's anywhere round, I shan't last long in Danny's, and it's essential to keep you out of suspicion for as long as possible. So this'll be our last open meeting for some time. But you can communicate by telephone—as long as you make sure nobody can hear you."

"Right you are," said Stannard.

Simon Templar flicked a cigarette into his mouth and reached for the matches.

Stannard had a queer transient feeling of unreality. It seemed

fantastic that he should be associated with such a project as that into which the Saint had initiated him. It seemed equally fantastic that the Saint should have conceived it and brought it into being. That cool, casual young man, with his faultless clothes, his clipped and slangy speech, and his quick, clear smile—he ought to have been lounging his amiable easy-going way through a round of tennis and cocktail parties and dances, instead of . . .

The Saint lighted his cigarette and held out his hand to terminate the interview; and the corners of his mouth were twitching in a smile.

"So long, son," he said. "And good hunting!"

"Same to you," said Stannard warmly.

But before he left, Stannard got a query off his chest. "Didn't you say there were five of you?"

His hands in his pockets, teetering gently on his heels, the Saint favored Stannard with his most Saintly smile.

"I did, he drawled. "Four little Saints and Papa. But as for the other four, they are like the Great White Woolly Wugga-Wugga on the plains of Astrakhan."

Stannard gaped at him. "What does that mean?" he asked.

"I ask you, dear boy," answered the Saint, with that exasperatingly seraphic smile still on his lips, "has anyone ever seen a Great White Woolly Wugga-Wugga on the plains of Astrakhan? Sleep on it, my cherub—it will keep your mind from impure thoughts."

V

TO ALL official intents and purposes, the proprietor and leading light of Mr. Edgar Hayn's night club in Soho was the man after whom it was named—Danny Trask.

Danny was short and dumpy, a lazy little tub of a man, with a round red face, a sparse head of fair hair, and a thin sandy moustache. His intelligence was not very great. Nevertheless, he had discovered quite early in life that there was a comfortable living to be made in the profession of "front man"—a job which calls for no startling intellectual gifts—and Danny had accordingly made that his vocation ever since.

The club theoretically opened at 6 p.m., but the food was not good, and most of its members preferred to dine elsewhere. The first arrivals usually began to drift in about 10 p.m., but things never began to get exciting before 11 o'clock. Danny spent the hours between 6 o'clock and the commencement of the fun sitting in his shirt sleeves in his little cubicle by the entrance, sucking a foul old briar and tentatively selecting the next day's losers from an evening paper.

He was engaged in this pleasant pursuit towards 8 o'clock on a certain evening when Jerry Stannard arrived.

"Has Mr. Hayn come in yet, Danny?"

Danny made a pencil note of the number of pounds which he had laboriously calculated that Wilco would have in hand over Man of Kent in the Lingfield Plate, folded his paper, and looked up.

"He don't usually come in 'till late, Mr. Stannard," he said. "No, he ain't here now."

Danny's utterances always contrived to put the cart before the horse. If he had wanted to give you a vivid description of a death bed scene, he would have inevitably started with the funeral.

"Oh, it's all right—he's expecting me," said Stannard. "When he arrives you can tell him I'm at the bar."

"Right you are, sir."

"Oh—and before I forget. . ."

"Sir?"

"A Mr. Templar will be here later. He's okay. Send down for me when he arrives, and I'll sign him in."

"Very good, sir."

Danny returned to his study of equine form, and Stannard passed on.

He went through the lounge which occupied the ground floor, and turned down the stairs at the end. Facing these stairs, behind a convenient curtain, was a secret door in the panelling, electrically operated, which was controlled by a button on the desk in Hayn's private office. This door, when opened, disclosed a flight of stairs running upwards. These stairs communicated with the upper rooms which were one of the most profitable features of the club, for in those rooms *chemin-de-fer,* poker, and *trente-et-quarante* were played every night with the sky for a limit.

Hayn's office was at the foot of the downward flight. He had personally supervised the installation of an ingenious system of mirrors, by means of which, with the aid of a large sound-proof window let into the wall at one end of the office, without leaving his seat, he was able to inspect everyone who passed through the lounge above. Moreover, when the secret door swung open in response to the pressure of his finger on the control button, a further system of mirrors panelled up the upper flight of stairs gave him a view right up the stairway itself and round the landing into the gaming rooms. Mr. Hayn was a man with a cunning turn of mind, and he was preeminently cautious.

Outside the office, in the basement, was the dance floor, surrounded with tables, but only two couples were dining there. At the far end was the dais on which the orchestra played, and

at the other end, under the stairs, was the tiny bar.

Stannard turned in there, and roused the white-coated barman from his perusal of *La Vie Parisienne*. He asked for a straight whiskey and was downing it when Hayn came in.

The big man was looking pale and tired, and there were shadows under his eyes. He nodded curtly to Jerry. "I'll be with you in a minute," he said. "Just going to get a wash."

Braddon, who had remained outside, followed Hayn into the office.

"Who's the boy friend?" he asked, taking a chair.

"Stannard?" Hayn was skimming through the letters that waited on his desk. "An ordinary young fool. He lost eight hundred upstairs in his first couple of months. Heaven knows how much he owes outside—he'd lost a packet before I started lending him money. He enjoys ruining himself."

Braddon searched through his pockets for a cigar, and found one. He bit off the end, and spat. "Got expectations? Rich papa who'll come across?"

"No. But he's got the clothes, and he'd pass anywhere. I'm using him."

Hayn had slit open the letter with his thumbnail, but he only took one glance at what it contained. He tossed it over to Braddon, and it was the manager of Laserre who drew out the now familiar stick figure sketch.

"One of those came to my house by the first post this morning," Hayn said. "It's as old as the hills, that game. So he thinks he's going to rattle me!"

Then he pulled himself together.

"I'm giving Stannard dinner," he said. "What are you doing now?"

"I'll loaf out and get some food, and be back later," said Braddon. "I thought I'd take a look upstairs."

Hayn nodded. He ushered Braddon out of the office, and locked the door behind him, for even Braddon was not allowed to remain in that sanctum alone. Braddon departed and Hayn rejoined Stannard at the bar.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, old man," he apologized, with an attempt to resume his poise of bluff geniality.

"I've been amusing myself," said Stannard, and indicated a row of empty glasses. "Have a spot?"

Hayn accepted, and Stannard looked at his watch.

"By the way," he said, "there's a man due here in about an hour. I met him the other day, and he seemed all right. He said he was a South African, and he's sailing back the day after tomorrow. He was complaining that he couldn't get any real fun in England, so I dropped a hint about a private

gambling club I might be able to get him into and he jumped at it."

"That's all right with me." A thought struck Mr. Hayn. "You're quite sure he wasn't one of these clever dicks?"

"Not on your life!" scoffed Stannard. "I think I know a busy when I see one by now. And this man seems to have money to burn."

Hayn nodded. "I meant to come to some arrangement with you over dinner," he said. "This bird can go down as your first job, on commission. If you're ready, we'll start."

Stannard assented, and they walked over to the table which had been prepared.

Hayn was preoccupied. If his mind had not been simmering with other problems, he might have noticed Stannard's ill-concealed nervousness, and wondered what might have been the cause of it. But he observed nothing unusual about the younger man's manner.

While they were waiting for the grapefruit, he asked a question quite perfunctorily. "What's this South African's name?"

"Templar—Simon Templar," answered Jerry.

The name meant nothing at all to Mr. Hayn.

Over the dinner, Hayn made his offer—a twenty percent commission on business introduced. Stannard hardly hesitated before accepting.

"Yes—I'll join you," he said. "I've known it was coming. I didn't think you'd go on lending me money for looking decorative and doing an odd job for you now and again."

"My dear fellow—"

"Dear-fellowing doesn't alter it. I know you want more of me than my services in decoying fools upstairs. Are you going to tell me you didn't know I was caught the other day?"

Hayn stroked his chin. "I was going to compliment you. How you got rid of that parcel of snow—"

"The point that matters is that I did get rid of the vile stuff," cut in Stannard briefly. "And if I hadn't been able to, I should have been on remand in Brixton Prison now."

"I like you," said Mr. Hayn, "but I wish you wouldn't put things so crudely. You don't have to be squeamish about the dope side of it. If people choose to make fools of themselves like that, it's their own look-out."

Stannard shrugged. "I can't afford to argue, anyhow," he said. "How much do I draw?"

"Twenty per cent—as I told you."

"What's that likely to make?"

"A lot," said Hayn. "We pay higher here than anywhere else in London, and there isn't a great deal of competition in the snow

market. You might easily draw upwards of seventy pounds a week."

"Then will you do something for me, Mr. Hayn? I owe a lot of money outside. I'll take three thousand flat for the first year, to pay off everybody and fit myself up with a packet in hand."

"Three thousand pounds is a lot of money," said Hayn judicially. "You owe me nearly a thousand as it is."

"If you don't think I'm going to be worth it—"

"I'll give you a check tonight," said Hayn.

Stannard was effusively grateful. "You won't lose by it," he promised. "Templar's a speculation, granted, but I've met him only once. But there are other people with mints of money, people I've known for years. That I can vouch for absolutely."

He went on talking, but Hayn only listened with half an ear, for he was anxious to turn the conversation on to another topic, and he did so at the first opportunity, taking care not to be obtrusive about it."

Under pretense of taking a fatherly interest in his new agent's affairs, he plied him with questions about his private life and interests. Most of the information which he elicited was stale news to him, for he had long since taken the precaution of finding out everything of importance that there was to know about his man; but in these new inquiries Mr. Hayn contrived to make Stannard's fiancee the center of interrogation without seeming to do so.

It was very cleverly done, but the fact remains that at the end of half an hour, by this process of indirect questioning, Hayn had discovered all that he wanted to know about the life and habits of Gwenn Chandler.

"Do you think you could get her along here to supper on Thursday?" he suggested. "The only time I've met her, if you remember, I think you rather prejudiced her against me. It's up to you to put that right."

"I'll see what I can do," said Stannard.

After that, his point won, Hayn had no further interest in directing the conversation, and they were chatting desultorily when Simon Templar arrived.

VI

THE SAINT, after weighing the relative merits of full evening dress or an ordinary lounge suit for the auspicious occasion, had decided upon a compromise, and was sporting a dinner jacket. He wore it, as might have been expected, as if he had been an Ambassador paying a State visit in full regalia.

"Hullo, Jerry, dear angel!" he hailed Stannard cheerfully.

Then he noticed Mr. Hayn,

and turned with outstretched hand.

"And you must be Uncle Ambrose," he greeted that gentleman cordially. "Pleased to meet you. . . . That's right, isn't it, Jerry? This is the uncle who died and left all his money to that Cat's Home? Sorry to see you looking so well, Uncle Ambrose, old mongoose!"

Mr. Hayn seemed somewhat taken back. This man did not wear his clothes in the manner traditionally associated with raw Colonials with money to burn, nor was his speech typical of that of strong silent men from the great open spaces.

He looked round to Jerry Stannard with raised eyebrows, and Stannard tapped his forehead and lifted his glass significantly.

"So we're going to see a real live gambling hell!" said the Saint, drawing up a chair. "Isn't this fun? Let's all have a lot of drinks on the strength of it!"

He called for liqueurs, and paid for them from a huge wad of banknotes which he tugged from his pocket. Mr. Hayn's eyes lit up at the sight, and he decided that there were excuses for Templar's eccentricity. He leant forward and set himself out to be charming.

"I have just written a poem," said Simon Templar abruptly. "It's about a loose-living lunkhead called Hayn, who was born in a barn in the rain. What he'd struggled to hide was found out when he'd died—there was mildew all over his brain. Now, that one's been getting a big hand everywhere I've told it since I made it up, and it'll be one of the bitterest disappointments of my life if it doesn't send you, sweetheart!"

Hayn stared at him incredulously. "What did you say your name was?" he rasped.

"I'm called the Saint," Simon replied. But don't let's get melodramatic about it, chum. The last man who got melodramatic with me was hanged at Exeter six months back. It doesn't seem to be healthy!"

Hayn looked round. The diners had left, and as yet no one had arrived to take their places. But the clatter of his chair upsetting had roused three startled waiters, who were starting uncertainly in his direction. But a review of these odds did not seem to disturb the Saint, who was lounging languidly back in his seat with his hands in his pockets and a benign expression on his face.

"I suppose you know that the police are after you," grated Hayn.

"I didn't," said the Saint. "That's interesting. Why?"

"You met some men in the Brighton train and played poker with them. You swindled them right and left, and when they accused you, you attacked them and

pinched the money. I think that's good enough to put you away for some time."

"And who's going to identify me?"

"The four men."

"You surprise me," drawled Simon. "I seem to remember that on that very day, just outside Brighton racecourse, those same four bums were concerned in beating up a poor little coot of a lame bookie named Tommy Mitre and pinching *his* money. There didn't happen to be any policeman about—they arranged it quite cleverly—and the crowd that saw it would most likely all be too scared of the Snake to give evidence. But yours truly and a couple of souls also saw the fun. We were a long way off, and the Snake and his boys were over the horizon by the time we got to the scene, but we could identify them all, and a few more who were not there—and we shouldn't be afraid to step into the witness box and say our piece."

Hayn relaxed again slowly. The alert waiters also relaxed—they were a tough crowd, and selected more for their qualities of toughness than for clean fingernails and skill at juggling with plates and dishes. But as Hayn sat down his right hand went behind his chair—his back was towards the group of waiters—and with his fingers he made certain signs. One of the waiters faded away inconspicuously.

"So what do you propose to do?" Hayn said.

"Leave you," answered the Saint benevolently. "I know your ugly face isn't your fault, but I've seen about as much of it as I can stand for one evening."

The Saint rose and walked unhurriedly to the stairs. By that time there were five men ranged in a row at the foot of the stairs, and they showed no signs of making way for anyone.

"We should hate to lose you so soon, Mr. Templar," said Hayn.

The Saint's lounging steps slowed up, and stopped. His hands slid into his pockets, and he stood for a moment surveying the quintet of waiters with a beatific smile. Then he turned.

"What are these?" he inquired pleasantly. "The guard of honor or the cabaret chorus?"

"I think you might sit down again, Mr. Templar," suggested Hayn.

"And I think not," said the Saint. "I said I was going to leave you, and I am," he added, with a gentleness that was in amazing contrast to the intent tautness of his bearing." That's what I came here for, ducky—to leave you. This is just meant for a demonstration of all-round superiority. You think you can stop me—but you watch! I'm going to prove that nothing on earth can stop

me when I get going. Understand, loveliness?"

"We shall see," said Hayn.

The Saint's smile became, if possible, even more saintly. "In the space of a few minutes," he said "you're going to see a sample of rough-housing that'll make your bunch of third-rate hoodlums look like two cents' worth of cat's meat. But before I proceed to beat them up, I want to tell you this—which you can pass on to your friends. Are you ready?"

Hayn spread out his hands.

"It's just this," said Templar. "We Saints are normally souls of peace and good will towards men. But we don't like racketeers, traders in vice and damnation, and other verminous excrescences of that type—such as yourself. We're going to beat you up and do you down, skin you and smash you, and scare you off the face of Europe. We are not bothered about the letter of the Law. Ganning got hurt, but still you don't believe me. By the time I've finished with you, you'll be an example to convince others. I'm leaving now!"

He stooped suddenly, and grasped the leg of Hayn's chair and tipped it backwards with one jerking heave. As Hayn tried to scramble to his feet, the Saint put an ungentle foot in his face and upset the table on top of him.

The tough waiters were pelting across the floor in a pack. Simon reached out for the nearest chair and sent it skating over the room at the height of six inches from the ground, with a swing of his arms that gave it the impetus of a charging buffalo. It smashed across the leader's knees and shins with bone-shattering force, and the man went down with a yell and rolled over on his side.

The Saint had another chair in his hands by the time the next man was upon him. The waiter stopped it with his head; then the Saint stepped back and reversed the swing of his chair abruptly. It swerved under the next man's guard and crashed murderously into his short ribs.

The fifth waiter ran slap into a sledge hammer left that hurled him a dozen feet away. As the man collapsed, the Saint whipped round and caught Stannard.

"Fight, you fool!" the Saint whispered in his ear. "This is for local color!"

Stannard clinched, and then the Saint broke away and firmly but regretfully clipped him on the jaw.

It was not one of the Saint's heftiest punches, but it was hard enough to knock Stannard down convincingly; and then the Saint looked around hopefully for something else to wallop, and found nothing.

He collected hat, gloves and stick from the cloakroom, and went through the upstairs lounge.

As he reached the door, he met Braddon returning.

"Hullo, Sweetness," said the Saint genially. "Wait till you hear the new joke the boys in the back room are laughing at."

Braddon was still trying to guess the cause for and meaning of this extraordinary salutation by a perfect stranger, when the Saint, without any haste, but so swiftly and deftly that the thing was done before Braddon realized what was happening, had reached out and seized the brim of Braddon's hat and forced it well down over his eyes. Then, with a playful tweak of Braddon's nose, and a wave of his hand to the dumbfounded Danny, he departed with a broad grin on his face.

Mr. Hayn, turning from watching the Saint's triumphant vanishment, had swung sharply on Stannard. All around him, it seemed, an army of tough waiters in various stages of disrepair were gathering themselves to their feet with a muttered obbligato of lurid oaths.

"You damned fool!" he blazed. "Couldn't you see he was up to something? Are you taken in by everyone who tells you the tale?"

"I told you I couldn't guarantee him," Stannard protested. "But when I met him he wasn't a bit like he was tonight. Honestly, Mr. Hayn—how could I have known he was the Saint? I don't even know what he was after yet."

"South African grandmothers," snarled Hayn.

"The kid's right," said Braddon. "If he put it over on the Snake, he might put it over on anybody."

There was logic in the argument, but it was some time before Hayn could be made to see it. But presently he quieted down.

"We'll talk about this, Braddon," he said. "I've got an idea for stopping his funny stuff. He didn't get clean away—I put Keld on to follow him. By tonight we'll know where he lives, and then I don't think he'll last long."

He turned to Jerry Stannard. The boy was fidgeting nervously, and Hayn became diplomatic. It wasn't any use rubbing a valuable man up the wrong way.

"I'm sorry I lost my temper," he said. "I can see it wasn't your fault. You just want to be more careful. I ought to have warned you about the Saint—he's dangerous! Have a cigar." It was Mr. Hayn's peace offering.

Stannard accepted it. "No offense," he said. "I'm sorry I let you down."

"We don't say anything more about it," said Hayn heartily. "You won't mind if I leave you? Mr. Braddon and I have some business to talk over. I expect you'll amuse yourself upstairs.

But you mustn't play any more, you know."

"I shan't want to," said Stannard. "But, Mr. Hayn—"

Hayn stopped. "Yes?"

"Would you mind if I asked you for that check? I'll give you an I. O. U. now."

"I'll see that you get it before you leave."

"It's awfully good of you, Mr. Hayn," said Stannard apologetically. "Three thousand pounds it was."

"I hadn't forgotten," said Hayn shortly.

He moved off, cursing the damaged waiters out of his path; and Stannard watched him go, thoughtfully. So far, it had all been too easy. But how long was it going to last?

He was watching the early dancers assembling when a waiter whose face was obscured by a large piece of sticking-plaster, came through with a sealed envelope. Stannard ripped it open, inspected the check it contained, and scribbled his signature to the promissory note that came with it. He sent this back to Hayn by the same waiter, his features moodily impassive.

He strolled through the gaming rooms, greeted a few acquaintances, and watched the play for a while without enthusiasm. He left the club early, as soon as he conveniently could.

The next morning, he hired a car and drove rapidly out of London. He met the Saint on the Newmarket road at a prearranged milestone.

"There was a man following me," said the Saint happily. "When I got out of my bus, he took a taxi. I wonder if he gave it up, or if he's still toiling optimistically along, bursting the meter somewhere in the wilds of Edmonton."

He gave Stannard a cigarette, and received a check in return.

"A thousand pounds," said Stannard. "As I promised."

The Saint put it carefully away in his wallet.

"And why I should give it to you, I don't know," said Stannard.

"It is the beginning of wisdom," said the Saint. "The two thousand that's left will pay off your debts and give you a fresh start, and I'll get your I. O. U.'s back for you in a day or two. A thousand pounds isn't much to pay for that."

He climbed back into his car and pressed the self-starter, but Stannard was still curious.

"What are you going to do with the money?" he asked. "I thought you were against crooks."

"I am," said the Saint virtuously. "It goes to charity. Less my ten percent, commission charged for collecting. You'll hear from me again when I want you. *Au revoir*—or, in the Spanish, *hasta la vista*—or, if you prefer it in the German, *auf wiedersehen!*"

VII

ABOUT A WEEK after the Saint's mercurial eruption into Danny's, Gwen Chandler met Mr. Edgar Hayn in Regent Street one morning by accident. At exactly the same time, Mr. Edgar Hayn met Gwen Chandler on purpose, for he had been at some pains to bring about that accidental meeting.

"We see far too little of you these days, my dear," he said, taking her hand.

She was looking cool and demure in a summer frock of printed chiffon, and her fair hair peeped out under the brim of her picture hat to set off the cornflower blue of her eyes.

"Why, it seems no time since Jerry and I were having supper with you," she said.

"No time is far too long for me," said Mr. Hayn "One could hardly have too much of anyone as charming as yourself, my dear lady. And that is no idle compliment."

At the supper party which she had unwillingly been induced to join, he had set himself out to be an irreproachable host, and his suave geniality had gone a long way towards undoing the first instinctive dislike which she had felt for him, but she did not know how to take him in this reversion to his earlier pose of exaggerated heartiness. It reminded her of the playful romping advances of an elephant, but she did not find it funny.

Mr. Hayn, however, was for the moment as pachydermatous as the animal on whose pleasantries he appeared to have modeled his own, and her slightly chilling embarrassment was lost on him. He waved his umbrella towards the window of the shop outside which they were standing.

"Do you know that name, Miss Chandler?" he asked.

She looked in the direction indicated. "Laserre? Yes, of course, I've heard of it."

"I am Laserre," said Hayn largely. "This is the opportunity I've been waiting for to introduce you to our humble premises —and how convenient that we should meet on the very doorstep!"

She was not eager to agree, but before she could frame a suitable reply he had propelled her into the glittering red carpeted room where the preparations of the firm were purveyed in a hushed and reverent atmosphere reminiscent of a cathedral.

A girl assistant came forward, but in a moment she was displaced by Braddon himself—frock-coated, smooth, hands at washing position.

"This is my manager," said Hayn, and the frock-coated man bowed. "Mr. Braddon, be so good as to show Miss Chandler some samples of the best of our products—the very best."

Thereupon, to the girl's bewilderment, were displayed velvet lined mahogany trays, brought from the shelves that surrounded the room, and set out with loving care on a counter, one after another, till she felt completely dazed.

"I want you to choose anything you like," said Hayn. "Absolutely anything that takes your fancy, my dear Miss Chandler."

"But—I—I couldn't possibly," she stammered.

Hayn waved her objections aside. "I insist," he said. "What is the use of being owner of a place like this if you cannot let your friends enjoy it? Surely I can make you such a small present without any fear of being misunderstood?"

She modestly chose a small vanity case and a little flask of perfume, and he seemed disappointed by her reluctance. He pressed other things upon her, and she found herself forced to accept two large boxes of face powder.

She had a terrified suspicion that in a moment he would utter an invitation to lunch, and she hastily begged to be excused on the grounds of an entirely fictious engagement.

"Please don't think me rude, hurrying away like this," she pleaded. "As a matter of fact, I'm already shockingly late."

Hayn was plainly crestfallen. "No one can help forgiving you anything," he said. "But the loss to myself is irreparable."

She never knew afterwards how she managed to keep her end up in the exchange of platitudes that followed, until the return of Braddon with a neat package enabled her to make her escape.

Hayn accompanied her out into the street, hat in hand. "At least," he said, "promise me that the invitation will not be unwelcome, if I ring you up soon and ask you to suggest a day. I could not bear to think that my company was distasteful to you."

"Of course not—I should love to—and thank you ever so much for the powder and things," she said desperately. "But I must fly now."

She fled as best she might.

Hayn watched her out of sight, standing stockstill in the middle of the pavement where she had left him, with a queer gleam in his pale eyes. Then he put his hat on, and marched off without reentering the shop.

He made his way to the club in Soho, where he was informed that Snake Ganning and some of the Boys were waiting to see him. Hayn let them wait while he wrote a letter, which was addressed to M. Henri Chastel, Poste Restante, Athens; and he was about to ring for the Snake to be admitted when there was a tap on the door and Danny entered.

"There are five of them," said Danny helpfully.

"Five of whom?" said Hayn patiently.

"Five," said Danny, "including the man who pulled Mr. Braddon's hat down over his eyes. They said they must see you at once."

Mr. Hayn bent over his drink, struggling to control his nerves for the bluff that was all he had to rely on, and with an effort of will he succeeded in not looking up when he heard the door opening and the soft footsteps of men filing into the room.

"Walk right in, souls," said the Saint's unmistakable cheery accents. "That's right . . . park yourselves along the wall in single rank and stand easy."

Then Hayn raised his eyes, and saw the Saint standing over the desk regarding him affectionately.

"Good morning, Edgar," said the Saint affably. "How's Swan?"

"Good morning, Mr. Templar," said Hayn.

He shifted his gaze to the four men ranged beside the door. They were a nondescript quartet, in his opinion—not at all the sort of men he had pictured in his hazy attempts to visualize Templar's partners. Only one of them could have been under thirty, and the clothes of all of them had seen better days.

"These are the rest of the gang," said the Saint. "I noticed that I was followed home from here last time I called, so I thought it'd save you a lot of sleuthing if I brought the other lads right along and introduced them."

Hayn nodded. "That's very considerate of you, Mr. Templar," he said, and his voice was a little shaky, for an idea was being born inside him. "Is that all you came to do?"

"Not quite, Precious," said the Saint, settling down on the edge of the desk. "I came to talk business."

"Then you won't want to be hurried," said Hayn. "There are some other people waiting to see me. Will you excuse me while I go and tell them to call again later?"

The Saint smiled. "By all manner of means, sonny," said he. "But I warn you it won't be any use telling the Snake and his Boys to be ready to beat us up when we leave here, because a friend of ours is waiting a block away with a letter to our friend Inspector Teal—and that letter will be delivered if we don't report safe and sound in ten minutes from now!"

"You needn't worry," said Hayn. "I haven't underrated your intelligence!"

He went out. It was a mistake he was to regret later—never before had he left even his allies alone in that office, much less a confessed enemy. But the urgency of his inspiration had, for the

moment, driven every other thought out of his head.

He found Snake Ganning sitting at the bar with three picked Boys, and beckoned them out of earshot of the bartender.

"The Saint and the rest of his band are in the office," he said, and Ganning let out a virulent exclamation. "No—there won't be any rough business now. I want to have a chance to find out what his game is. But when the other four go, I want you to tail them and find out all you can about them. Report here at midnight, and I'll give you your instructions about Templar himself."

"When I get hold of that swine," Ganning ground out vitriolically, he's going to—"

Hayn cut him short with an impatient sweep of his hand. "You'll wait till I've finished with him," he said. "You don't want to charge in like a bull before you know what's on the other side of the gate. I'll tell you when to start—you can bet your life on that!"

And in that short space of time the Saint, having shamelessly seized the opportunity provided by Hayn's absence, had comprehensively ransacked the desk. There were four or five I. O. U.'s with Stannard's signature in an unlocked drawer, and these he pocketed. Hayn had been incredibly careless. And then the Saint's eye was caught by an envelope on which the ink was still damp. The name "Chastel" stood out as if it had been spelt in letters of fire, so that Simon stiffened like a pointer.

His immobility lasted only an instant. Then, in a flash, he scribbled something on a blank sheet of notepaper and folded it into a blank envelope. With the original before him for a guide, he copied the address in a staggeringly lifelike imitation of Hayn's handwriting.

"I shall now be able to give you an hour, if you want it," said Hayn, returning, and the Saint turned with a bland smile.

"I shan't take nearly as long as that," he replied. "But I don't think the proceedings will interest the others, and they've got work to do. Now you've met them, do you mind if I dismiss the parade?"

"Not at all, Mr. Templar."

There was a glitter of satisfaction in Hayn's eyes; but if the Saint noticed it, he gave no sign.

"Move to the right in column o' route—etcetera," he ordered briskly. "In English, hop it!"

The parade, after a second's hesitation, shuffled out with expressionless faces. They had not spoken a word from the time of their entrance to the time of their exit.

It may conveniently be recorded at this juncture that Snake Ganning and the Boys spent eleven laboriously profitless hours

following a curbstone vendor of bootlaces, a pavement artist, and a barrel organ team of two ex-servicemen, whom the Saint had hired for ten shillings apiece for the occasion. It may also be mentioned that the quartet, assembling at a nearby dairy to celebrate the windfall, were no less mystified than were the four painstaking bloodhounds who dogged their footsteps for the rest of the day.

It was the Saint's idea of a joke—but then, the Saint's sense of humor was remarkably broad . . .

"And now let's get down to business—as the bishop said to the actress," murmured Simon, fishing out a slender gold case and tapping a cigarette on his thumbnail. "I want to ask you a very important question."

Hayn sat down. "Well, Mr. Templar?"

"What would you say," said the Saint tentatively, "if I told you I wanted ten thousand pounds?"

Hayn smiled. "I should sympathize with you," he answered. "You're not the only man who'd like to make ten thousand pounds as easily as that."

"But just suppose," said Simon persuasively—"just suppose I told you that if I didn't get ten thousand pounds at once, a little dossier about you would travel right along to Inspector Teal to tell him the story of the upstairs rooms here and the inner secrets of the Maison Laserre. I could tell him enough to send you to penal servitude for five years."

Hayn's eye fell on the calendar hung on the wall, with a sliding red ring round the date. His brain was working very rapidly then. Suddenly, he felt unwontedly confident. He looked from the calendar to his watch, and smiled.

"I should write you a check at once," he said.

"And your current account would stand it?"

"All my money is in a current account," said Hayn. "As you will understand, it is essential for a man in my position to be able to realize his estate without notice."

"Then please write," murmured the Saint.

Without a word, Hayn opened a drawer, took out his checkbook, and wrote. He passed the check to Templar, and the Saint's eyes danced as he read it.

"You're a good little boy," said the Saint. "I'm so glad we haven't had any sordid argument and haggling about this. It makes the whole thing so crude, I always think."

Hayn shrugged. "You have your methods," he said. "I have mine. I ask you to observe the time." He showed his watch, tapping the dial with a stubby forefinger. "Half-past twelve of a Saturday afternoon. You cannot

cash that check until nine o'clock on Monday morning. Who knows what may have happened by then? I say you will never pay that check into your bank. I'm not afraid to tell you that. I know you won't set the police on me until Monday morning, because you think you're going to win—because you think that at nine o'clock on Monday morning you'll be sitting on the bank's doorstep waiting for it to open. I know you won't. Do you honestly believe I would let you blackmail me for a sum like that?"

The crisis that he had been expecting for so long had come. The cards were on the table, and the only thing left for Edgar Hayn to wonder was why the Saint had waited so many days before making his demand. Now the storm which had seemed to be hanging fire interminably had broken, and it found Edgar Hayn curiously unmoved.

Templar looked at Hayn sidelong, and the Saint also knew that the gloves were off. "You're an odd cove," he said. "Your trouble is that you're too serious. You'll lose this fight because you've no sense of humor—like all second-rate crooks. You can't laugh."

"I may enjoy the last laugh, Templar," said Hayn.

The Saint turned away with a smile, and picked up his hat. "You kid yourself," he said gently. "You won't, dear one." He took up his stick and swung it delicately in his fingers. The light of battle glinted in his blue eyes. "I presume I may send your kind donation to the London Hospital anonymously?"

"We will decide that on Monday," said Hayn.

The Saint looked at him steadily. "On Monday night you will sleep at Marlborough Street Police Station," he said dispassionately.

The next moment he was gone. Simon Templar had a knack of making his abrupt exits so smoothly that it was generally some minutes before the other party fully realized that he was no longer with them.

Hayn sat looking at the closed door without moving. Then he glanced down, and saw the envelope that lay on the blotter before him, addressed, in his own hand to M. Henri Chastel. And Hayn sat fascinated, staring, for although the imitation of his hand might have deceived a dozen people who knew it, he had looked at it for just long enough to see what it was not the envelope he had addressed.

It was some time before he came out of his trance, and forced himself to slit open the envelope with fingers that trembled. He spread out the sheet of paper on the desk in front of him, and his brain went numb. As a man might have grasped a concrete fact through a murky

haze of dope, Hayn realized that his back was to the last wall. Underneath, the superficial veneer of flippancy, the Saint had shown for a few seconds the seriousness of his real quality and the intentness of his purpose, and Hayn had been allowed to appreciate the true mettle of the man who was fighting him.

He could remember the Saint's last words. "On Monday night you will sleep at Marlborough Street Police Station." He could hear the Saint saying it. The voice had been the voice of a judge pronouncing sentence, and the memory of it made Edgar Hayn's face go grey with fear.

VIII

THE SAINT read Edgar Hayn's letter in the cocktail bar of the Piccadilly, over a timely Martini, but his glass stood for a long time untasted before him, for he had not to read far before he learned that Edgar Hayn was bigger game than he had ever dreamed.

Then he smoked two cigarettes, very thoughtfully, and made certain plans with a meticulous attention to detail. In half an hour he had formulated his strategy, but he spent another quarter of an hour and another cigarette going over it again in search of anything that he might have overlooked.

He did not touch his drink until he had decided that his plans were as foolproof as he could make them at such short notice.

The first move took him to Piccadilly Post Office, where he wrote out and dispatched a lengthy telegram in code to one Norman Kent, who was at that time in Athens on the Saint's business; and the Saint thanked his little gods of chance for the happy coincidence that had given him an agent on the spot. It augured well for the immediate future.

Next he shifted across from the counter to a telephone book and called a number. For ten minutes he spoke earnestly to a certain Roger Conway, and gave minute directions. He had these orders repeated over to him to make sure that they were perfectly memorized and understood, and presently he was satisfied.

"Hayn will have found out by now that I know about his connection with Chastel," he concluded, "that is, unless he's posted the letter without looking at it. We've got to act on the assumption that he *has* found out, and therefore the rule about having nothing to do with me except through the safest of safe channels is doubly in force. I estimate that within the next forty-four hours a number of very strenuous efforts will be made to bump me off, and it won't be any good shutting your eyes to it. It won't be dear Edgar's fault

if I haven't qualified for a funeral by Monday morning."

Simon lunched at his leisure, and then relaxed in a convenient movie until half-past six. Then he returned home to dress, and was somewhat disappointed to find no reply to his cable waiting for him at his flat.

He dined and spent the evening at the Ritz and then decided to return home.

He had observed the speedy-looking closed car that stood by the curb directly outside the entrance to his flat, and he had seen the four men who stood in a little group on the pavement beside it conversing with all apparent innocence, and he had guessed the worst. The sum total seemed to him to bear the unmistakable hall-mark of the Hayn confederacy; for the Saint had what he called a nasty suspicious mind.

He strolled on at a leisurely pace. His left hand, in his trouser pocket, was sorting out the key of his front door; in his right hand he twirled the stick that in those days he never traveled without. As he drew near the little group he noticed that they fell suddenly silent, all turning in his direction.

The Saint was humming a little tune. It all looked too easy—nothing but a welcome and entertaining limbering-up for the big stuff that was to follow. He had slipped the front door key off the ring and transferred it to a side pocket of his jacket, where it would be more easily found in a hurry.

"Excuse me," said the tallest of the four taking a step forward to meet him.

"I'm afraid I can't excuse you, Snake," said the Saint regretfully and swayed back from his toes as Ganning struck at him with a loaded cane.

The Saint felt the wind of the blow caress his face, and then a lightning left uppercut came rocketing up from his knees to impact on the point of Snake's jaw, and Ganning was catapulted back into the arms of his attendant Boys.

Before any of them could recover from their surprise, Templar had leapt lightly up the steps to the portico, and had slipped the key into the lock. But as he turned and withdrew it, the other three came after him, leaving their chief to roll away into the gutter, and the Saint wheeled round to face them with the door swinging open behind him.

He held his stick in both hands, gave it a halfturn, and pulled. Part of the stick stripped away, and in the Saint's right hand a long slim blade of steel glinted in the dim light. His first thrust took the leading Boy through the shoulder, and the other two checked.

The Saint's white teeth flashed in an unpleasant smile. The rapier in his hand gleamed and

whistled, and the two recoiled with gasps of agony as the supple blade lashed across their faces. And then, as they sprang to attack, the Saint streaked through the door and slammed it on them.

He turned the sword back into a stick, and went unhurriedly up the stairs to his flat, which was on the next floor.

Looking down from the window, he saw the four men gathered together in furious deliberation. One of them was mopping about inside his coat with an unsanitary handkerchief, and the Snake was sagging weakly back against the side of the car holding his jaw. There were frequent gesticulations in the direction of the Saint's windows. After a time, the four men climbed into the car and drove away.

Templar sauntered across the room, switched on the lights, and put away his hat and stick, humming gently to himself.

Propped up on the table, in a prominent position, was a cable envelope. Without any hurry, the Saint poured himself out a modest Peter Dawson, lighted a cigarette, and then fetched a small black notebook from its hiding place behind a picture. Provided with these essentials, he settled down on the edge of the table, ripped up the envelope, and extracted the flimsy.

"Elephant revoke," the message began. A little farther on was the name *Chandler*. And near the end of the closely written sheet were the words: "Caterpillar diamonds ten spades four chicane hearts knave overcall."

"Elephant" was the code word for Hayn; Chastel was "Caterpillar." "Revoke" meant "has changed his mind." And the Saint could almost decode the sentence which included the words "chicane" and "overcall" at sight.

In his little black book, against the names of every card in the pack, and every bridge and poker term, were short sentences broadly applicable to almost any purpose about which his fellowship of freebooters might wish to communicate; and with the aid of this book, and a pencil, the Saint translated the message and wrote the interpretation between the lines. The information thus gleaned was in confirmation of what he had already deduced since purloining and reading Hayn's letter to Chastel, and Simon was satisfied.

He opened his portable typewriter, and wrote a letter. It was the Saint's first official communication.

To Chief Inspector Teal
Criminal Investigation Department
New Scotland Yard
London, SW1
Sir,

I recommend to your notice Edgar Hayn, formerly Heine, of

27, Portugal Mansions, Hampstead. He is the man behind Danny's Club in Soho, and a well-timed raid on that establishment, with particular attention to a secret door in the panelling of the ground floor lounge (which is opened by an electric control in Hayn's office in the basement) will give you an interesting insight into the methods of card-sharping de luxe.

More important than this, Hayn is also the man behind Laserre, the Regent Street perfumers, the difference being that George Edward Braddon, the manager, is not a figurehead, but an active partner. A careful watch kept on future consignments received from the Continent by Laserre will provide adequate proof that the main reason for the existence of Laserre is cocaine. The drug is smuggled into England in cases of beauty preparations shipped by Hayn's foreign agents and quite openly declared—as dutiable products, that is. In every case, there will be found a number of boxes purporting to contain face powder, but actually containing cocaine.

Hayn's European agent is a French national named Henri Chastel. The enclosed letter, in Hayn's own handwriting, will be sufficient to prove that Hayn and Chastel were up to their necks in the whole European dope traffic.

Chastel, who is at present in Athens, will be dealt with by my agent there. I regret that I cannot hand him over to the regular processes of justice; but the complications of nationality and extradition treaties, would, I fear, defeat this purpose.

By the time you receive this, I shall have obtained from Hayn the donation to charity which it is my intention to extract before passing him on to you for punishment, and you may at once take steps to secure his arrest. He has a private plane at Stag Lane Aerodrome, Edgeware, which has for some time been kept in readiness against the necessity for either himself or one of his valued agents to make a hasty getaway. A watch kept on the airfield, therefore, should ensure the frustration of this scheme.

In the future, you may expect to hear from me at frequent intervals.

Assuring you of my best services at all times.

I remain,

THE SAINT.

With this epistle, beside Hayn's letter, Templar enclosed his artistic trademark. So that there should be no possibility of tracing him, he had had the paper on which it was drawn specially obtained by Stannard from the gaming rooms at Danny's for that purpose.

He addressed the letter, and after a preliminary survey of the

street to make sure that the Snake had not returned or sent deputies, he walked to a nearby pillar box and posted it. It would not be delivered until Monday morning, and the Saint was confident that that would give him all the time he needed.

Back in his flat, the Saint called up the third of his lieutenants, who was one Dicky Tremayne, and gave him instructions concerning the protection of Gwen Chandler. Finally he telephoned another number and called Jerry Stannard out of bed to receive orders.

At last he was satisfied that everything had been done that he had to do.

He went to the window, drew the curtains aside a cautious half-inch, and looked down again. A little farther up Brook Street, on the other side of the road, a blue sports roadster had drawn up by the curb. The Saint smiled approvingly.

He turned out the lights in the sitting room, went through to his bedroom, and began to undress. When he rolled up his right trousers leg, there was visible a little leather sheath strapped to his calf and in this sheath he carried a beautifully balanced knife —a mere six inches razor-keen, leaf-shaped blade and three inches of carved ivory hilt.

Outside, in the street, a motor horn hooted with a peculiar rhythm. It was a prearranged signal, and the Saint did not have to look out again to know that Ganning had returned. And then, almost immediately, a bell rang, and the indicator in the kitchen showed him that it was the bell of the front door.

"They must think I'm a sucker!" murmured the Saint.

But he was wrong—he had forgotten the fire escape across the landing outside the door of his flat.

A moment later he heard, down the tiny hall, a dull crash and a sound of splintering wood. It connected up in his mind with the ringing of the front door bell, and he realized that he had no monopoly of prearranged signals. That ringing had been to tell the men who had entered at the back that their companions were ready at the front of the building. The Saint acknowledged that he had been trapped into under-rating the organizing ability of Edgar Hayn.

Unthinkingly, he had left his automatic in his bedroom. He was quickly out of the kitchen into the hall, and at the sound of his coming the men who had entered with the aid of a jimmy swung round. Hayn was one of them, and his pistol carried a silencer.

"Well, well, *well!*" drawled the Saint, whose mildness in times of crisis was phenomenal, and prudently raised his hands high above his head.

"You are going on a journey with me, Templar," said Hayn. "We are leaving at once, and I can give no date for your return. Kindly turn round and put your hands behind you."

Templar obeyed. His wrists were bound, and the knots tightened by ungentle hands.

"Are you still so optimistic, Saint?" Hayn taunted him, testing the bonds.

"More than ever," answered the Saint cheerfully. "This is my idea of a night out—as the bishop said to the actress."

Then they turned him round again.

"Take him downstairs," said Hayn.

They went down in a silent procession, the Saint walking without resistance between two men. The front door was opened and a husky voice outside muttered: "All clear. The flattie passed ten minutes ago, and his beat takes him half an hour."

The Saint was passed on to the men outside and hustled across the pavement into the waiting car. Hayn and two other men followed him in; a third climbed up beside the driver. They moved off at once, heading west.

At the same time, a man rose from his cramped position on the floor of the sport roadster that waited twenty yards away. He had been crouched down there for three-quarters of an hour, without a word of complaint for his discomfort, to make it appear that the car was empty, and the owner inside the house opposite which the car stood. The starter whirred under his foot as he sidled round behind the wheel, and the powerful engine woke to a throaty whisper.

The car in which the Saint rode with Hayn flashed up the street, gathering speed rapidly; and as it went by, the blue sport roadster pulled out from the curb and purred westwards at a discreet distance in its wake.

Roger Conway drove. The fit of his coat was spoiled by the solid bulge of the automatic in one pocket, and there was a stern set to his face which would have amazed those who only knew that amiable young man in his more flippant moods.

From his place in the leading car Simon Templar caught in the driving mirror a glimpse of the following car and smiled deep within himself.

IX

GWEN CHANDLER lived in a microscopic flat in Bayswater, the rent of which was paid by the money left her by her father. She did the housekeeping herself, and, with this saving on a servant, there was enough left over from her income to feed her and give her a reasonably good time. None of the few relatives she had

ever paid much attention to her.

She would have been happy with her friends, and she had been, but all that had stopped abruptly when she had met and fallen in love, head over heels, with Jerry Stannard.

She knew that it was Jerry's practice to lie in bed late on Sunday mornings—but then, it was his practice to lie in bed late on all the other six days of the week. On this particular Sunday morning, therefore, when a ring on the front door bell had disturbed her from the task of preparing breakfast, she was surprised to find that he was her visitor.

"This *is* a surprise!" she said.

He was trying to hide agitation, but she discerned that the agitation was not of the harassed kind.

"Got any breakfast for me?" he asked. "I had to come along at this unearthly hour, because I don't know that I'll have another chance to see you all day. Make it snappy, because I've got an important appointment."

"It'll be ready in a minute," she told him.

He loafed about the kitchen, whistling, while she fried eggs and bacon, and sniffed the fragrant aroma appreciatively.

"It smells good," he said, "and I've got the appetite of a lifetime."

She would have expected him to breakfast in a somewhat headachy silence; but he talked cheerfully.

"It must be years since you had a decent holiday," he said. "I think you deserve one, Gwen. What do you say if we get married by special license and run over to Deauville next week?"

He laughed at her bewildered protests.

"I can afford it," he assured her. "I've paid off everyone I owe money to, and in a fortnight I'm getting a terribly sober job, starting at ten pounds a week."

"How did you get it?"

"A man called Simon Templar found it for me. Have you ever met him, by any chance?"

She shook her head, trying to find her voice.

"I'd do anything in the world for that man," said Jerry.

"Tell me about it," she said.

He told her—of his miraculous rescue by the Saint and the interview that followed it, of the Saint's persuasiveness, of the compact they had made. He also told her about Hayn; but although the recital was fairly inclusive, it did not include the machinations of the Maison Laserre. The Saint never believed in telling anybody everything, and even Hayn had secrets of his own.

The girl was amazed and shocked by the revelation of what Stannard's life had been and might still have been. But all

other emotions were rapidly submerged in the great wave of relief which swept over her when she learned that Stannard had given his word to break away, and was even then working on the side of the man who had brought him back to a sense of honor—even if that honor worked in an illegal method.

"I suppose it's crooked, in one way," Stannard admitted. "They're out to get Hayn and his crowd into prison. But first they're swindling them on behalf of charity. I don't know how they propose to do it. On the other hand, though, the money they've got back for me from Hayn is no more than I lost in cash at his beastly club."

"But why did Hayn let you keep on when he knew you'd got no money left?"

Stannard made a wry grimace. "He wanted to be able to force me into his gang. I came in, too —but that was because Templar told me to agree to anything that would make Hayn pay me that three thousand pound check."

She digested the information in a daze. The revelation of the enterprise in which Jerry Stannard was accompliced to the Saint did not shock her. Womanlike, she could see only the guilt of Hayn and the undoubted justice of the punishment. Only one thing made her afraid.

"If you were caught—"

"There'll be no fuss," said Jerry. "Templar's promised me that, and he's the kind of man you'd trust with anything. I haven't had to do anything criminal. And it'll all be over in a day or two. Templar rang me up last night."

"What was it about?"

"That's what he wouldn't tell me. He told me to go to the Splendide at eleven and wait for a man called Tremayne, who may arrive any time up to one o'clock, and he'll tell me the rest. Tremayne's one of Templar's gang."

Then she remembered Hayn's peculiar behavior of the previous morning. The parcel she had brought away from Laserre still lay unopened on her dressing table.

Jerry was interested in the account. Hayn's association with Laserre, as has been mentioned, was news to him. But he could make nothing of the story.

"I expect he's got some foolish crash on you," he suggested. "It's only the way you'd expect a man like that to behave. I'll speak to Templar about it when I see him."

He left the dining room as soon as he had finished breakfast, and was back in a moment with his hat.

"I must be going now," he said, and took her in his arms. "Gwen dear, with any luck it'll all be over very soon, and we'll

be able to forget it. I'll be back as soon as ever I can."

She kissed him.

"God bless you. And be careful, my darling!"

Half an hour after he had gone, when the breakfast things had been cleared away, and she was tidying herself to go out for a walk there was a ring on the front door bell.

She answered it; and when she saw that it was Edgar Hayn, after what Jerry had been able to tell her, she would have closed the door in his face. But he pushed through before she could collect her wits.

He led the way into the sitting room, and she followed in mingled fear and anger. Then she saw that there were dark rings round his eyes, and his face was haggard.

"What is it?" she asked coldly.

"The police," he said. "They're after me—and they're after you too. I came to warn you."

"But why should they be after me?" she demanded blankly.

He was in a terrible state of nerves. His hands fidgeted with his umbrella all the time he was talking, and he did not meet her eyes.

"Drugs!" he said gruffly. "Illicit drugs. Cocaine. You know what I mean! There's no harm in your knowing now—we're both in the same boat. They've been watching me, and they saw me with you yesterday and followed you."

"But how do you know?"

"I've got friends at Scotland Yard," he snapped. "It's necessary, policemen aren't incorruptible. But my man let me down—he never gave me the tip till the last moment. They're going to raid this flat and search it this morning."

Her brain was like a maelstrom, but there was one solid fact to hold on to.

"There's nothing for them to find."

"That's where you're wrong! Those things I gave you—one of our other boxes got mixed up in them. I've just found that out. That's why I'm here. There's six ounces of cocaine in this flat!"

She recoiled, wide-eyed. Her heart was thumping madly. It all seemed too impossible, too fantastic. . . . And yet it only bore out and amplified what Jerry had been able to tell her. She wondered frantically if the excuse of innocence would convince a jury. Hayn saw the thought cross her mind, and shattered it.

"You know how Jerry's lived," he said. "No one would believe that you weren't both in it!"

He looked out of the window. She was impelled to follow his example, and she was in time to see two broad-shouldered men in bowler hats entering the house.

"They're here!" said Hayn breathlessly. "But there may be a

chance. I recognized one of the men—he's a friend of mine. I may be able to square him."

Outside, a bell rang.

Hayn was scribbling something on a card. "Take this," he muttered. "My car's outside. If I can get them away from you for a moment, slip out and show the card to the chauffeur. I've got a house at Hurley. He'll take you there, and I'll come down later and discuss how we're going to get you and Jerry out of the country."

The bell rang again, more urgently. Hayn thrust the pasteboard into the girl's hand.

"What're you hesitating for?" he cried. "Do you want to stand in the dock at the Old Bailey beside your lover?"

Hardly knowing what she did, she put the card in her bag.

"Go and open the door," Hayn commanded. "They'll break in if you don't."

As he spoke, there came yet a more insistent ringing, and the flat echoed with the thunder of a knocker impatiently plied.

The girl obeyed, and at the same time she was thinking furiously. Jerry—or his chief, this man Templar—would know how to deal with the crisis; but for the moment there was no doubt that Hayn's plan was the only practicable one. Her one idea was to stay out of the hands of the police long enough to make sure that Jerry was safe, and to give them time to think out an escape from the trap in which Hayn had involved them.

The two broad-shouldered men entered without ceremony as she opened the door.

"I am Inspector Baker, of Scotland Yard," said one of them formally, "and I have a warrant to search your flat. You are suspected of being in illegal possession of a quantity of cocaine."

The other man took her arm and led her into the sitting room. Hayn came forward, frowning.

"I must protest about this," he said. "Miss Chandler is a friend of mine."

"That's unlucky for you," was the curt reply.

"I'll speak to Baker about this," threatened Hayn hotly, and at that moment Baker came in.

He was carrying a small cardboard box with the label of Laserre. "Poudre Laserre," the label said. But the powder was write and crystalline.

"I think this is all we need," said Baker, and stepped up to Gwen. "I shall take you into custody on a charge—"

Hayn came between them. "I should like a word with you first," he said quietly.

Baker shrugged. "If you must waste your time—"

"I'll take the risk," said Hayn. "In private, please."

Baker jerked his thumb. "Take Miss Chandler into another room, Jones."

"Jones had better stay," interrupted Hayn. "What I have to say concerns him also. If you will let Miss Chandler leave us for a minute, I will guarantee that she will not attempt to escape."

There was some argument, but eventually Baker agreed. Hayn opened the door for the girl, and as she went out gave her an almost imperceptible nod. She went into her bedroom and picked up the telephone. It seemed an eternity before the paging system of the Splendide found Jerry. When he answered, she told him what had happened.

"I'm going to Hayn's house at Hurley," she said. "It's the only way to get out at the moment. But tell Tremayne when he comes, and get hold of Templar, and do something quickly!"

He was beginning to object, to ask questions, but there was no time for that, and she hung up. She tiptoed down the hall, and opened the door.

From the window, Hayn, Baker and Jones watched her cross the pavement and enter the car.

"She's a peach, boss," said Baker enviously.

"You've said all I wanted you to say," Hayn returned shortly. "But it's worked perfectly. If I'd simply tried to kidnap her, she'd have been twice as much nuisance. As it is, she'll be only too glad to do everything I say."

Dick Tremayne arrived two minutes after Hayn's car had driven off. He should have been there over an hour earlier, but a traffic snarl had delayed him; a contingency the Saint could not have anticipated. Now he had to act on his own initiative.

After a second's indecision, Tremayne realized that there was only one thing to do. If Hayn and his men were already in the flat, he must just blind in and hope for the best; if they had not yet arrived, no harm would be done.

He went straight into the building, and on the way up the stairs he met Hayn and two other men coming down. There was no time for deliberation or planning a move in advance.

"You're the birds I'm looking for," Tremayne said, barring the way. "I'm Inspector Hancock, of Scotland Yard, and I shall arrest you—"

So far he got before Hayn lashed out at him. Tremayne ducked, and the next instant there was an automatic in his hand.

"Back up those stairs to the flat you've just left," he ordered. The men retreated before the menace of his gun. They stopped at the door of the flat, and Tremayne told Hayn to ring. They waited.

"There seems to be no reply," said Hayn sardonically.

"Ring again," Tremayne said.

Another minute passed.

"There can't really be anyone at home," Hayn remarked.

Tremayne's eyes narrowed. There was something about the tone of Hayn's sneering voice . . .

"You swine!" said Tremayne through his teeth. "What have you done with her?"

"With whom?" inquired Hayn blandly.

"With Gwen Chandler!"

Tremayne could have bitten his tongue off as soon as the words were out of his mouth. That fatal, thoughtless impetuosity which was always letting him down! He saw Hayn suddenly go tense, and knew that it was useless to bluff further.

"So you're one of the Saint's men," said Hayn softly.

"Yes, I am!" Tremayne let out recklessly. "And if you scabs don't want me to plug you full of holes—"

He had been concentrating on Hayn and so he had not noticed the other men edging nearer. A hand snatched at his gun and wrenched. As Dicky Tremayne swung his fist to the man's jaw, Hayn dodged behind him and struck at the back of his head with a little rubber truncheon.

X

JERRY STANNARD never understood how he managed to contain himself until one o'clock. Much less did he understand how he waited the further half-hour which he gave Dicky Tremayne for grace.

When half-past one came, and there was still no sign of Tremayne the suspense became intolerable. Stannard went to the telephone, and fruitlessly searched London over the wires for Simon Templar. He could learn nothing from any of the clubs or hotels or restaurants which he might have frequented, nor was he any more successful with his flat. He began restlessly to pace the room.

It was after two o'clock by that time, and Tremayne had not arrived. He tried to ring up Gwen Chandler's flat, but after an interminable period of ringing, the exchange reported "No reply."

Jerry Stannard took a grip on himself. With a savage resolution, he telephoned to a garage where he was known. While he waited, he scribbled a note for Tremayne in which he described the whole series of events and stated his intentions. It was time wasted, but he was not to know that.

When the car arrived, he dismissed the mechanic who had brought it around, and drove to Hurley.

It was nearly five o'clock when he arrived there, and then he realized a difficulty. There were a lot of houses at Hurley, and he had no idea where Hayn's house might be. Nor had

the post office, nor the nearest police.

Stannard, in the circumstances, dared not press his inquiries too closely. The only hope to him was that he might be able to glean some information from a villager, for he was forced to conclude that Hayn tenanted his country seat under another name. With this forlorn hope in view, he made his way to the Bell, and it was there that he met a surprising piece of good fortune. Almost it seemed a miracle.

As he pulled up outside, a man came out, and the man hailed him.

"Thank the Lord you're here," said Roger Conway without preface. "Come inside and have a drink."

"Who are you?" asked a mystified Jerry Stannard.

"You don't know me, but I know you," answered the man. "I'm one of the Saint's haloes."

He listened with a grave face to Stannard's story.

"There's been a hitch somewhere," he said, when Jerry had finished. "The Saint kept you in the dark because he was afraid your natural indignation might run away with you. Hayn had designs on your girl friend—you might have guessed that. The Saint pinched a letter of Hayn's to Chastel—Hayn's man abroad—in which, among other things, Edgar described his plot for getting hold of Gwen. I suppose he wanted to be congratulated on his ingenuity.

"The rough idea was to plant some cocaine on Gwen in a present of powder and things from Lasserre, fake a police raid, and pretend to square the police for her. Then, if she believed the police were after you and her—Hayn was banking on making her afraid that you were also involved—he thought it would be easy to get her away with him."

"And the Saint wasn't doing anything to stop that?" demanded Jerry, white-lipped.

"Half a minute! The Saint couldn't attend to it himself, having other things to deal with, but he put Tremayne, the man you were supposed to have met at the Splendide, on the job. Tremayne was to get hold of Gwen before Hayn arrived, and tell her the story—we were assuming that you hadn't told her anything—and then bring her along to the Splendide and join up with you. The two of you were then to take Gwen down by car to the Saint's bungalow at Maidenhead and stay down there till the trouble had blown over."

"What's the Saint been doing all this time?" Jerry demanded.

"That's another long story," Conway answered. "He'd got Hayn's check for five figures, and that makes the risk bigger. There was only one way to settle it."

Roger Conway briefly described the Saint's employing of the four spoof Cherubs. "After that was found out, Simon figured Hayn would think the gang business was all bluff, and he'd calculate there was only the Saint against himself. Therefore he wouldn't be afraid to try on his scheme about Gwen, even though he knew the Saint knew it, because the Saint was going to be out of the way. Anyhow, Hayn's choice was between getting rid of the Saint and going to prison, and we could guess which he'd try first.

"The Saint had figured out that Hayn wouldn't simply try a quick assassination, because it wouldn't help him to be wanted for murder. There had got to be a murder, of course, but it would have to be well planned. So the Saint guessed he'd be kidnapped first and taken away to some quiet spot to be done in, and he decided to play stalking-horse.

"He did that because if Hayn were arrested, the check would be stopped automatically, so Hayn had got to be kept busy till tomorrow morning. I was watching outside the Saint's flat in a fast car last night, as I'd been detailed to do, in case of accidents. The Saint was going to make a fight of it. But they got him somehow. I saw him taken out to a car they had waiting—and I followed down here. Tremayne was to be waiting at the Splendide for a phone call from me at two o'clock. I've been trying to get him ever since, and you as well, touring London over the toll line, and it's cost a small fortune. And I didn't dare to go back to London, because of leaving the Saint here. That's why I'm damned glad you've turned up."

Stannard sprang up. "But Hayn's got Gwen!" he half sobbed. "Roger, we can't hang about, not for anything, while Gwen's—"

"We aren't hanging about any longer," said Roger quietly.

His hand fell with a firm grip on Jerry Stannard's arm, and the youngster steadied up. Conway led him to the window of the bar, and pointed.

"You can just see the roof of the house, over there," he said. "Since last night, Hayn's gone back to London, and his car came by again about two hours ago. I couldn't see who was in it, but it must have been Gwen. Now—"

He broke off suddenly. In the silence, the drone of a powerful car could be heard approaching. Then the car itself whirled by at speed, but it did not pass too quickly for Roger Conway to glimpse the men who rode in it.

"Hayn and Braddon in the back with Dicky Tremayne between them!" he said tensely.

He was in time to catch Stan-

nard by the arm as the boy broke away wildly. Conway thrust him roughly into a chair and stood over him. Stannard was as helpless as a child in Conway's hands.

"You keep your head and listen to me!" Roger said sharply. "We'll have another drink and tackle this sensibly."

"If we phone the police—"

"Nothing doing! This has got to be dealt with in a way that will dovetail in with the Saint's general plan of campaign. You know that as well as I do."

He ordered a brace of stiff whiskies and a pile of sandwiches, and while these were being brought he wrote a letter which he sealed. Then he went in search of the proprietor, whom he knew of old, and gave him the letter.

"If I'm not here to claim that in two hours," he said, "I want you to open it and telephone what's inside to Scotland Yard. Will you do that for me, as a great favor, and ask no questions?"

The landlord agreed, somewhat perplexedly.

"Is it a joke?" he asked good-humoredly.

"It may grow into one," Roger Conway replied. "But I give you my word of honor that if I'm not back at eight o'clock, and that message isn't opened and phoned punctually, the consequences may include some of the most unfunny things that ever happened!"

XI

THE SAINT had slept. As soon as they had arrived at the house at Hurley—he knew it was Hurley, for he had traveled that road many times over the course of several summers—he had been pushed into a bare-furnished bedroom and left to his own devices. These were not numerous, for the ropes had not been taken off his wrists.

A short tour of inspection of the room had shown that, in the circumstances, it formed an effective prison. The window, besides being shuttered, was closely barred; the door was of three-inch oak, and the key had been taken away after it had been locked.

Glints of sunlight were stabbing through the interstices of the shutters when he was alerted by the sound of his door opening. He saw two men enter. One carried a tray of food, and the other carried a club. This concession to the respect in which the gang held him, even when bound and helpless, afforded the Saint infinite amusement.

"This is sweet of you," he said; and indeed he thought it was, for he had not expected such a consideration, and he was feeling hungry. "But, my

angels of mercy," he said, "I can't eat like this."

They sat him down in a chair and tied his ankles to the legs of it and then the cords were taken off his wrists and he was able to stretch his cramped arms. They watched him eat, standing by the door, and the cheerful comments with which he sought to enliven the meal went unanswered.

When he had finished, one of the men fastened his hands again, while the other stood by with his bludgeon at the ready. Then they untied his ankles and left him, taking the tray with them.

The searchers had also left him his cigarette-case and matches, and with some agility and a system of extraordinary contortions the Saint managed to get a cigarette into his mouth and light it. This feat of double-jointed juggling kept him entertained for about twenty minutes; but as the afternoon wore on he developed, in practice, a positively brilliant dexterity. He had nothing else to do.

He would have been a lot more comfortable if his hands had not been bound, but he decided not to release himself until there was good cause for it. The Saint knew the tactical advantage of keeping a card up his sleeve.

The room, without any noticeable means of ventilation, was growing hotter and stuffier, and the cigarettes he was smoking were not improving matters. Regretfully, the Saint resigned himself to giving up that pleasure, composed himself on the bed again and soon found himself dozing.

It was the sound of his door opening that roused him, and he blinked his eyes open with a sigh.

It was Edgar Hayn who came in.

"Evening," murmured the Saint politely.

Hayn came over to the bedside, his lips drawn back in an unlovely smile. "Still feeling bumptious, Templar?" he asked.

"Ain't misbehavin'," said the Saint. "I am savin' my love for you."

The man who had held the bludgeon at lunch stood in the doorway. Hayn stood aside and beckoned him in.

"There are some friends of yours downstairs," said Hayn. "I should like to have you all together."

"I should be charmed to oblige you—as the actress said to the bishop," replied the Saint.

And he wondered whom Hayn could be referring to, but he showed nothing of the chill of uneasiness that had leaped at him for an instant.

He was not left long in doubt.

The bludgeon merchant jerked him to his feet and marched him down the corridor and down the stairs, Hayn bringing up the rear. The door of a room opening off the hall stood ajar, and from within came a murmur of voices which faded into stillness as their footsteps were heard approaching. Then the door was kicked wide, and Simon was thrust into the room.

Gwen Chandler was there—he saw her at once. There were also three men whom he knew, and one of them was a dishevelled Dicky Tremayne.

Hayn closed the door and came into the center of the room. "Now, what about it, Templar?" he said.

"What, indeed?" echoed the Saint.

His lazy eyes shifted over the assembled company.

"Greetings, Herr Braddon," he murmured. "Hullo, Snake. Great heavens, Snake! What's the matter with your face?"

"What's the matter with my face?" Ganning snarled.

"Everything, honeybunch," drawled the Saint. "I was forgetting. You were born like that."

Ganning came close, his eyes puckered with fury. "I owe you something," he grunted, and let fly with both fists.

The Saint slipped the blows, and landed a shattering kick to the Snake's shins. Then Braddon interposed a foot between the Saint's legs, and as Simon went down Ganning loosed off with both feet.

"That'll do for the present," Hayn cut in at last.

He took Templar by the collar and yanked him into a sitting position on a chair.

"You filthy blots!" Tremayne was raving, with the veins standing out purply on his forehead. "You warts—you dirty, verminous—"

It was Braddon who silenced him, with a couple of vicious, backhand blows across the mouth. And Dick Tremayne, bound hand and foot, wrestled impotently with ropes that he could not shift.

Hayn passed the girl over to Braddon and Ganning, and went over to the Saint's chair.

"I'm going to ask you one or two questions, Templar," he said. "If you don't want to let the Snake have another go at you, you'll answer them truthfully."

"Pleasure," said the Saint briefly. "George Washington was the idol of my childhood."

Everything he had planned had suffered a sudden reversal. Gwen Chandler had been caught, and so had Dicky. Their only hope was in Roger Conway—and how long would it be before he discovered the disaster and got busy?

"How many of you are there?" asked Hayn.

"Seventy-six," said the Saint. "Two from five—just like when you were at Borstal."

There was no one behind him. He had got his legs well back under the chair. His arms were also reaching back, and he was edging his little knife out of its sheath.

"You can save the rest of your questions," he said. "You must think I was born yesterday! Listen, sweetheart! Last night I posted a little story to Inspector Teal, which he'll get Monday morning. That letter is in the post now—and nothing will stop it—and the letter to friend Henri I enclosed with it will make sure the cops pay a lot of attention to the rest of the things I had to say. You haven't an earthly, Edgar!"

Hayn stepped back as if he had received a blow, and his face was horribly ashen. The Saint had never imagined that he would cause such a sensation.

"I told you he'd squeak!" Braddon was raging. "You fool —I told you!"

"I told him, too," said the Saint. "Oh, Edgar—why didn't you believe your Uncle Simon?"

Hayn came erect, his eyes blazing. He swung round on Braddon.

"What's the difference?" he demanded harshly. "We've all come to this—that's why we've got those airplanes. We leave tonight, and Teal can look for us tomorrow as long as he likes."

He turned on the Saint. "You'll come with us—you and your friend. You will not be strapped in. Somewhere in mid-Channel we shall loop the loop. You understand. Templar, you have undone years of work, and I'm going to make you pay for it! I shall escape, and after a time, I shall be able to come back and start again. But you—"

"I shall be flitting through Paradise, with a halo round my hat," murmured the Saint. "What a pleasant thought!"

And as he spoke he felt his little knife biting into the cords on his wrists.

"We lose everything we've got," Braddon babbled.

"Including your liberty," said the Saint softly, and the knife was going through his ropes like a wire through cheese.

They all looked at him. Something in the way he had spoken those three words, something in the taut purposefulness of his body, some strange power of personality, held them spellbound. Bound and at their mercy, for all they knew, an unarmed man, he was yet able to dominate them. There was hatred and murder flaring in their eyes, and yet for a space he was able to hold them on a curb and compel them to listen.

"I will tell you why you have lost, Hayn," said the Saint, speaking in the same, gentle, leisured tones that nevertheless quelled them as definitely as if he had backed them up with a gun. "You made the mistake of kidding yourself that when I told you I was going to put you in prison, I was bluffing. You were sure that I'd never throw away such an opening for unlimited blackmail. Your miserable warped mind couldn't conceive the idea of a man doing and risking all that I did for nothing but an ideal. You judged me by your own crooked standards.

"That's where you crashed, because I'm not a crook. But I'm going to make crooks go in fear of me. You and your kind aren't scared enough of the police. You've got used to them —you call them by their names and swap cigarettes with them when they arrest you—it's become a game to you, with prison as a forfeit for a mistake, and bull-baiting's just the same as tiddly-winks, in your lives.

"But I'm going to give you something new to fear—the Unknown. You'll rave about us in the dock, and all the world will hear. And when we have finished with you, you will go to prison, and you will be an example to make others afraid. But you will tell the police that you cannot describe us, because there are still three left whom you do not know; and if we two came to any harm through you, the other three would deal with you, and they would not deal gently. You understand? You will never dare to speak."

"And do you think you will ever be able to speak, Templar?" asked Hayn in a quivering voice, and his right hand was leaping to his hip pocket.

The Saint chuckled, a low triumphant murmur of a laugh. "I'm sure of it!" he said, and stood up with the cords falling from his wrists.

The little throwing-knife flashed across the room like a chip of flying quicksilver, and Hayn, with his automatic half out of his pocket, felt a pain like the searing of a hot iron across his knuckles, and all the strength went out of his fingers.

Braddon was drawing at that moment, but the Saint was swift. He had Edgar Hayn in a grip of steel, and Hayn's body was between the Saint and Braddon.

"Get behind him, Snake!" Braddon shrilled. But as Ganning moved to obey, the Saint reached a corner.

"Aim at the girl, you fool!" Hayn gasped, with the Saint's hand tightening on his throat.

The Saint held Hayn with one hand only, but the strength of that hold was incredible. With

the other hand, he was fumbling with his cigarette-case.

Braddon had turned his gun into Gwen Chandler's face, while Ganning pinioned her arms. And the Saint had a cigarette in his mouth and was striking a match with one hand.

"Now do you surrender?" Braddon menaced.

"Like Hell I do!" cried the Saint.

His match touched the end of his cigarette, and in the same movement he threw the cigarette far from him. It made an explosive hiss like a launched rocket, and in a second everything was blotted out in a swirl of impenetrable fog.

Templar pushed Hayn away into the opacity. He knew to a fraction of a square inch where his knife had fallen after it had severed the tendons of Hayn's hand, and he dived for it. He bumped against Tremayne's chair, and cut him free in four quick slashes.

There came, from the direction of the window, the sound of smashing glass. A shadow showed momentarily through the mist.

"Gwen!"

It was Jerry Stannard's agonized voice. The girl answered him. They sought each other in the obscurity.

A sudden draught parted the wreathing clouds of the Saint's rapid - action smoke - screen. Stannard, with the girl in his arms, saw that the door was open. The Saint's unmistakable silhouette loomed in the oblong of light.

"Very, very efficient, my Roger," said the Saint.

"You can always leave these little things to me," said Mr. Conway, modestly, leaning against the front door, with Edgar Hayn, Braddon and Snake Ganning herded into a corner of the hall at the unfriendly end of his automatic.

They took the three men into a room where there was no smoke.

"It was *my* fiancée," pleaded Jerry Stannard.

"That's so," said the Saint tolerantly. "Dicky, you'll have to be content with Braddon. After all, he slugged you when your hands were tied."

It lasted half an hour all told, and then they gathered up the three components of the mess and trussed them very securely into chairs.

Then Conway remembered the message he had left in the landlord's hands at the Bell, and they piled hurriedly into the car in which Conway, and Stannard had driven up. They retrieved the message, tidied themselves, and dined.

"I think we can call it a day," said Simon comfortably, when the coffee was on the table. "The check will be cashed on Monday

morning, and the proceeds will be registered to the London Hospital, as arranged—less our ten percent commission, which I don't mind saying we've earned. I think I shall enclose one of my celebrated self-portraits—a case like this ought to finish in a worthily dramatic manner."

He stretched himself luxuriously, and lighted a fresh cigarette which did not explode.

"Before I go to bed tonight," he said, "I'll drop a line to old Teal and tell him where to look for our friends. I'm afraid they'll have a hungry and uncomfortable night, but I can't help that. And now, my infants, I suggest that we adjourn to London."

They exchanged drinks and felicitations with the lord and master of the Bell, and it should stand to the eternal credit of that amiable gentleman that not by the twitch of an eyebrow did he signify any surprise at the somewhat battered appearance of two of the party. Then they went out to their cars.

"Who's coming back with me?" asked Tremayne.

"I'm going back without you, laddie," said Jerry Stannard. "Gwen's coming with me!"

They cheered the Buick out of sight; and then the Saint climbed into the back of the sport roadster and settled himself at his ease.

"Mr. Conway will drive," he said. "Deprived of my charming conversation, you will ponder over the fact that our friend is undoubtedly for it. You may also rehearse the song which I've just composed for us to sing at his funeral—I mean wedding. It's about a wicked young lover named Jerry, who had methods decidedly merry. When the party got rough, was he fast with his stuff? Oh, very! Oh, very! . . . Oh, very! . . . Take me to the Ritz, Roger. I have a date with myself."

A single cryptic word in a murdered man's own blood, unexpected samplings of violence, and an Arizona Defense Research Project labeled "Top Secret" embroil the Saint in an extraordinary plot

THE UNESCAPABLE WORD

A Brand New SAINT Novelet

By LESLIE CHARTERIS

in the next issue

death in new guinea

by . . . Myron David Orr

In the jungles of New Guinea a murder trail may double back on itself in an accusing spiral.

SHANGHAI NELL'S waterfront dive in Marienberg, New Guinea, looked like a good many other dives in the coastal towns of equatorial Melanesia. But the other dives did not have Shanghai Nell. Shanghai Nell was the most beautiful Eurasian in all the islands of the South Seas. Traders, seamen from tramp steamers, half-caste natives, Chinese merchants and beach riffraff rubbed elbows with sea gypsies and more unsavory characters without trade or occupation while the local female talent contributed without discrimination to their unlawful desires and tastes.

It was late in the afternoon and the afternoon was like all other afternoons with the hot tropical sun directly overhead and the steam coming up from the muddy brown river and competing with the rotting odors of the jungle behind the village. Not even the creaking and wobbling fanning contraptions hung from the ceiling and operated by sleepy native boys gave any

It may be a little difficult to think of an ex-lawyer beachcomber in New Guinea as a knight in shining armor. But just such a knight must have been present in Myron David Orr's mind when he created Archibald McCann and gave him Shanghai Nell as an inspired counsellor. In McCann's book native houseboys falsely accused of murder are entitled to the best legal brains available, and he bases his case on the immense popularity of Dave Orr's stories.

relief to the "clientele" of the smoke-filled dive who came and departed like shadows in the dimly-lighted and windowless pub.

Nell moved among her customers, making small talk with those she knew and eyeing appraisingly those who were new. At the present time she was interested in a shiftless beach comber by the name of Archibald Sylvester Brewster McCann.

McCann had come, as usual, to the dive exactly at five and had taken his usual table in the darkest corner of the main room. She moved obliquely toward the table where he slouched in complete relaxation, smoking with the least possible exertion.

He watched her approach. His eyes appeared half closed and drowsy, but his mind was alert and he knew that she had something important on her mind as she quickly ended each conversation and moved closer to him. She was beautiful in an exotic way, and she was the only person who could stir him into action and make him do things which he had pledged himself never to do again—such as assisting the local Chief of Police, Jason French, in solving waterfront crimes and exposing narcotic smuggling and clearance paper forgeries.

Before he had time to prepare and strengthen his defenses, she had pulled a chair beside him and was saying, "There's a big fat friend of yours waiting for you upstairs in my room. He wants to see you."

McCann's eyes opened curiously as he adjusted his position from the small of his back to his seat. The perfume of lotus blossoms was strong in his nostrils as she leaned determinedly toward him.

"Big fat man?" he repeated.

"Kolanov," she said.

McCann knew Kolanov. He was a planter who had a ranch up in the hills and for whom he had prepared several legal contracts, at Nell's insistence.

McCann had long ago decided that Kolanov was a pest! McCann had come to Marienberg to get away from law. He never wanted to see a law book again. Law and civilization required too much activity. He wanted to forget obligations and just rest and sleep and be free to do nothing.

"And now what does that stout jackass want?" he demanded.

"I didn't ask him," said Nell.

But McCann could tell from the expression on her face that she was fully aware of his reasons for not wanting to see the man. McCann managed to smile. Nell had such expressive eyes! Sometimes they were green and sometimes they were blue. They were blue-green now. When Nell looked at him—well, Nell's eyes did something to him, and made

him say things which made him feel like a fool.

"Did anyone ever tell you that you are beautiful?" he said.

"Don't start that routine," she cautioned and patted his hand affectionately. "It's too hot. Besides, I think there is a fee—you can let me have it to apply on your bill."

McCann grinned. Nell was a remarkable woman. She never let her love life interfere with her financial affairs. He wondered exactly how much he did owe her for food and drink. Food was food and love was love and never would the two embrace.

"Look, Nell," he protested. "I don't want to see him—I'm hungry. He can wait."

Nell knew exactly how to make suggestions with an *"or else"* ring to them and when she said, "You'd better see him," McCann knew that he wouldn't get anything to eat unless he agreed wholeheartedly.

"I'll have Yee Lin fix your supper," she added. "It'll be ready when you get back."

McCann drew a deep breath, grinned and shrugged his broad shoulders helplessly. "Okay, beautiful," he said, pocketing his smelly pipe. "Make it sweet and sour spareribs. I'll be back in ten minutes."

McCann climbed the rickety stairs to the second floor and walked without hesitation through the dark hallway to the door of Nell's room. He could have found that door blindfolded, for he had gone through it many times before. He stopped suddenly and scowled. What in hell was Kolanov doing in Nell's apartment anyway? He hadn't thought of that angle before. The big fat slob! What business had Kolanov to be in Nell's room at all?

Angrily he pushed the door open, and strode into the room. Kolanov lolled in all his greasy fatness in the arm chair McCann always used. There was another man in the room—a thin, whip-like man with sunken cheeks and beady eyes who reminded McCann of a weasel jumping up to bare its teeth at him.

Kolanov started to roll back and forth. He was obviously attempting to get sufficient motion to carry himself over his fat paunch and project his great weight over the balancing point of his ham-like legs in order to stand erect. The thin man gave him a hand and between the two of them the planter managed to sway to his feet, and gesture amiably.

"Archie, my good fren'" he puffed. "How are you? Seet down, seet down. 'Ave a leedle drink, no?"

McCann glanced at the bottle of rum on the table and saw that it wasn't the usual rot-gut variety, but a respectable imported brand. Kolanov's thick Ruman-

ian accent was surfeited with fawning friendliness and McCann had a feeling that he had interrupted an argument.

Kolanov cleared his throat and motioned toward the thin man. "Archie, I want you to meet my new partner. Thees is Juan Nova, who is another dear fren' of mine. He has just now arrive from Madrid. Last year he work for me. He was my foreman."

Nova extended his hand. His voice was precise and Oxford-trained, but there was a slight Spanish accent as he said, "How do you do, McCann."

When Nova shook hands McCann's instant dislike of the man did not in any way take a turn for the better. Kolanov was grinning but the grin was forced.

McCann poured some of the rum into a glass on the table, sipped it momentarily and then gulped it in one swallow. "What is this all about, Kolanov?" he asked. "Nell said you wanted to see me *on business.*"

"That is right, McCann," said Nova quickly. "We want you to witness our partnership agreement."

"But, Juan, you do not understand," interrupted Kolanov. "My fren' Archie was once a beeg lawyer in Melbourne—a King's counsellor. I want him to read the partnership paper and see if it ees hokay, no?"

Nova looked at McCann suspiciously. McCann returned his stare coldly and then Nova turned his head and addressed Kolanov. "You didn't tell me that McCann was a lawyer," he said sharply. "I thought he was a—a—

"A beachcomber?" suggested McCann.

Nova looked confused. "Well, you know how it is in a place like Marienberg—"

"Yeah, I know," said McCann and poured himself another drink. "You hear a lot of unflattering things about people on the beach."

"Juan is paying me a good price for his share," explained Kolanov. "I have read the contract. But I want you to read it too before I sign."

Kolanov motioned toward Nova who took a folded paper from an envelope and handed it to McCann. McCann moved the bottle and spread the paper out on the table. It was the usual formal partnership contract. He became aware of the stillness and heat in the room as he read the contract. He couldn't hear Kolanov's usual sonorous breathing. He turned the paper. Both Kolanov and Nova were watching him—Kolanov with streams of perspiration running down his fat face and Nova with a derisively calculating smirk on his thin lips. They reminded him of vultures on a New Guinean funeral urn.

He finished reading the con-

tract. "It's okay," he said and before he could pour himself another drink Nova handed him a pen.

He signed his name as witness and then the rumpus started below. There were shouts and sounds of dishes being broken and dull thuds and breaking of wood. The three of them rushed to the small balcony overlooking the room below. A native police boy was struggling with two of the bartenders. He was waving a .45 caliber automatic pistol and trying to get to the stairway leading to the upper rooms.

"Let me go! Let me go!" the frantic young native was shouting. "I kill that Kolanov! I kill him! Let me go!"

Several waiters rushed in to help the bartenders. But with a violent lurch the police boy broke away and ran toward the stairs. McCann recognized him as Tabi —one of Chief Jason French's police boys. He was up the stairs in five quick bounds and the instant he saw Kolanov his face contorted in wild fury. He leveled the automatic pistol at the fat planter and then advanced slowly and menacingly.

"I kill you Kolanov!" he growled. "You steal my woman! I kill you now!"

McCann's long leg shot out and the .45 went hurtling into the air. Before the boy realized what had happened McCann had him immobilized with a firm arm-lock.

"All right, Tabi," said McCann calmly. "Take it easy. You aren't going to kill Kolanov!"

"He steal my woman," screamed Tabi, struggling futilely in McCann's powerful grasp. "I kill him! He steal everybody's woman!"

"Tabi!" McCann's voice cracked like a bull whip, and he applied quick pressure to Tabi's arm. "That's enough of such talk!"

Tabi howled with pain. "Massa McCann! Massa McCann," he pleaded. "You're breaking my arm!"

McCann lessened the pressure on Tabi's arm. He glanced at Kolanov. The planter's face was putty gray and his pig eyes bulged from their fat recesses like herniated umbilicuses. Kolanov was scared—damned scared.

"All right, Tabi," said McCann. "What makes you think Kolanov stole your woman?"

"Kolanov bad man," said Tabi. "Him come to my village three nights ago. Him take girl belong me. Him take her to his place. Him know she belong me. Her papa told him she belong me. *Now I kill him!*"

McCann looked at Kolanov. "How about it, Kolanov?" he asked.

"I—I don't know what he's talking about," Kolanov managed to stammer.

"He lies! He lies," cried Tabi and before McCann could stop him, he had reached into his shoulder holster beneath his shirt and brought out another pistol and had fired point-blank at Kolanov. Fortunately no tragedy resulted. McCann had been able to unbalance his aim and the bullet imbedded itself in the plaster far down the hallway.

McCann's fist connected with Tabi's chin and Tabi fell to the floor with a thud. Kolanov and Nova fought their way down the stairs past the bartenders and waiters who were making a concentrated rush toward Tabi. McCann stood at the head of the stairs and blocked their passage.

They stopped momentarily as if awed by his presence and then began to advance slowly and cautiously toward him.

Nell suddenly was at McCann's side. He didn't realize that she had joined him until he saw her hand flash out, and halt the advancing men. She barely moved her fingers with an arresting motion. But the men stopped, looked at her questioningly for a moment and then went back down the stairs as if nothing had happened.

"Take him to my room," said Nell.

McCann picked Tabi up and carried him into Nell's room and dumped him onto a couch.

"Nice fellow, this Kolanov," said McCann and shifted his trousers up over his narrow hips. "Tabi nearly got him. What in hell a woman can see in that fat tub of lard is beyond me!"

Nell leaned over and looked at Tabi. "Nice looking boy," she said. "Did you have to hit quite as hard as you did?"

"Nuts!" exclaimed McCann disgustedly. "He was going to kill Kolanov. You don't *tap* a killer. You slug 'em!"

Nell put a pillow under Tabi's head. "Your supper is waiting," she told McCann. "How long will he be out?"

"I've no idea," said McCann, pulling back one of Tabi's eyelids. "Maybe fifteen or twenty minutes—unless we douse him."

"You go down and eat," said Nell. "I'll stay here with him until he comes to."

McCann looked at her curiously for a moment and then grinned. "Okay, beautiful," he said. "Don't let him get away. I want to have a talk with him."

As McCann ate his satisfying supper of sweet and sour spareribs, he recalled the gossip that had become so widespread concerning Kolanov and his "women." All of the stories were sordid and disgusting. No doubt Kolanov *had* taken Tabi's girl, and Tabi had a right to be resentful. Kolanov was wealthy and unmarried—a bad combination for the tropics.

Just as he was finishing his

meal, Nell came to his table and sat down beside him.

"Is Tabi still out?" he asked.

"No, I sent him home."

"My God, woman!" exclaimed McCann. "He'll go after Kolanov and kill him. What made you do that?"

"Calm yourself, Archie," said Nell, patting him affectionately on the cheek. "We had a nice long talk and I convinced him that you would help him. He promised he'd do nothing rash."

McCann drew a deep breath and sighed wearily. "I give up!"

"He's coming to see you tonight at your place," said Nell.

"Well, I'll get his guns so he won't be using them again," said McCann and started toward the stairs.

"Oh, I gave his guns back to him," said Nell. "It would get him into serious difficulty with Chief French if he didn't have his guns when he reported back to police headquarters."

McCann turned and looked down at Nell. He shook his head slowly from side to side and pressed his full lips into a straight line. "Baby," he said, "sometimes I wonder just how stupid a woman can be! If he kills Kolanov now you'll be responsible."

Nell got up and stood for an instant smiling down at him. "Don't worry, big boy," she said. "I'll be responsible for Tabi. He won't do anything rash. I had a very understanding talk with him and he is going to let you handle everything."

Tabi didn't come to see McCann that night, but it wasn't until about ten o'clock the following morning that McCann learned the reason for the young native's failure to appear. He was passing the police station on his way to Nell's place when Jason French saw him, and called out to him.

"I say, Archie, old boy—will you come in for a moment? I want to talk to you."

The only time French ever wanted to talk to McCann was when he was in trouble. McCann wondered what trouble had come up and then he had a sudden feeling that something had happened to Kolanov.

"I learned about the row between Tabi and Kolanov yesterday," said French as McCann entered the police chief's office. "This morning, Juan Nova—Kolanov's hired man—came to the station and said that Kolanov had been murdered. He accused Tabi."

McCann turned pale. "Did Nova see Tabi kill him?" he asked.

"No," French said. "But he gave us a good reason to suspect Tabi."

"Oh," said McCann and the tension went out of his stare. "Have you been out to the Kolanov ranch?"

French nodded. "I not only went out to the ranch. I rounded up all the firearms and had ballistic tests made in order to eliminate the possibility that Kolanov might have had other deadly enemies."

"And you have now come to the conclusion that Tabi did it?" asked McCann.

"Kolanov was killed by a forty-five bullet and none of the guns at the ranch was used to fire the bullet we dug out of Kolanov."

"And you think that proves Tabi did it?"

"Well—"

McCann looked at French thoughtfully for several seconds. Nell had assured him that Tabi would not do anything rash. Well, Nell was generally right about her conclusions, but he couldn't exactly afford to let her think he trusted her decisions in such matters. However, this was one time he would have to gamble on Nell.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"You know these natives around here better than any white man," said French. "They trust you and believe in you. I want you to help me find Tabi. He's one of my police boys, you know."

McCann grinned. "In other words, you want me to help you save face," he said. "Okay, Jason, I'll help you find Tabi. But first, let's go to Kolanov's ranch. I want a first hand look-see."

McCann and French went to the Kolanov ranch where they found Nyamu, Kolanov's houseboy, gossiping with several of the plantation workers. The workers made a quiet exit when they saw Chief French. Nyamu faced them expectantly.

"Hello, boy! What you do here?" asked McCann.

"His name's Nyamu and he's Kolanov's houseboy," French informed him.

"Nyamu no talk now," said the houseboy nervously. "Tongue belong Nyamu plenty much sick."

"None of them will talk," said French disgustedly.

"Do you mind waiting outside?" asked McCann.

French shrugged his shoulders and swung about on his heels.

"You know me?" asked McCann.

"Sure," grinned Nyamu. "You good massa. You good massa Mackcan."

"Maybe Nyamu talk now?" asked McCann, offering the lad a cigarette.

Nyamu went to the door and saw that French was too far enough away to hear what was being said inside the house. He came back, and took the cigarette and stuck it behind his ear.

"Nyamu talk now," he said.

"Do you know the man who killed Massa Kolanov?"

"No massa."

"Tell me all you know—about what you saw and what you heard."

"Nyamu work here in kitchen," said the houseboy slowly and thoughtfully. "Byenbye, Nyamu hear one shot. Nyamu stop work and listen, listen, listen. No hear no more. Nyamu begin work again mebbe ten-fifteen minute more. Then bang, bang, bang, bang, bang—five time shot plenty quick. All boys come running in, ask 'What happen?' Nyamu no know. Nyamu ask boys where shot come from. Boys say up trail. Nyamu go up trail into bush and find Massa Kolanov plenty much dead. Nyamu scared, run back to house, go hunt Massa Nova. No find Massa Nova. Byenbye, Nyamu see Massa Nova coming up trail from Marienberg. Nyamu run quick tell Massa Nova Massa Kolanov killed. Massa Nova take boys and go fetchem Massa Kolanov this place. Thass all."

"Where's Massa Nova?" asked McCann.

"Right here," said Nova and came into the room.

"Oh, hello, Nova. Chief French and I came up to look over the murder scene," McCann told him.

"French?" said Nova, glancing around the room.

"He's outside. I'll call him."

McCann called to French who came back to the house.

"I'm sorry to trouble you again," said French as he came into the house and saw Nova. "But McCann wanted me to look over the ground with him. He's going to help locate Tabi."

"I shall be delighted to do everything in my power to assist Mr. McCann," said Nova with a slight bow. "May I serve you gentlemen refreshments?"

"Never touch the stuff," said McCann.

"Got any ice for the drinks?" asked French.

"Sorry, not a bit."

"None for me then," said French.

"Of course you know that Mr. Nova made a partnership agreement with Kolanov," McCann said, watching Nova closely.

French looked surprised. "No, I didn't know that," he said. "I thought Nova was Kolanov's foreman."

Nova said impatiently: "Last month I inherited some money and I thought that I would like to buy into the plantation—it makes a neat profit each year, as you know. Mr. Kolanov and I came to an agreement on the price and Mr. McCann looked over the papers and we signed it last night."

There was a questioning expression in French's eyes as he looked at Nova. McCann added, "Nova gets everything."

"Have you any idea who might have killed Kolanov other than Tabi?" asked French.

Nova studied the tips of his fingers for a moment and then said, "Well there *is* another angle. But I don't know just how to figure it out."

"Why don't you tell us," said McCann. "Perhaps we can help you."

"Well, I have some ideas—as I've told Chief French."

"Tell McCann everything you told me," said French. "I want him to get the picture I have."

"Well, I hate to talk about the dead," said Nova hesitantly, "but Kolanov was quite free with the natives—I mean the women. It is common knowledge that he has quite a few children by native women. Of course he pays the father of the girl and sees that her family has plenty of food. That generally keeps the family satisfied."

Nova smiled wryly and added, "I guess he's paid for a number of children who weren't actually his."

McCann waited for him to continue. Nova started walking back and forth across the room. He finally stopped in front of McCann. McCann didn't like the crafty and calculating look in his eyes, and neither was he impressed with the studied movements of the man's "thoughtful" pacing.

"Kolanov has many enemies," Nova began. "I happen to know he has had several bad arguments with natives about the money he *hasn't* been paying for his fathering activities."

McCann was unimpressed. "Maybe so," he grunted and turned to French. "Do you keep a ballistic record of your police boys' guns?" he asked.

French stared at him, puzzled. "No. Why?"

"I was thinking it might either connect or eliminate Tabi," said McCann. "You could make a comparison of the bullets from your records and the one taken from Kolanov."

"You're right. I never thought of it before," said French.

McCann turned to Nova. "I'd like to see the place where Kolanov was murdered."

"But there's nothing there," protested French. "We've made a complete search of the place for evidence."

McCann grinned at the police chief. He wanted to remind French of the many times French hadn't seen importance evidence even though it had been right at his fingertips. But all he said was: "Let's go out anyway. I'd like to see the place."

Nova led them into the dense jungle back of the plantation along a narrow trail that wound in and out of the tangled undergrowth and giant tropical trees. They came to an opening in the jungle where the trail ran

through tall plumed grass and looked at first like a reddish gray line in the brilliant sunlight, and then became black as it plunged into a group of towering eucalyptus trees on the opposite side of a narrow clearing.

"Where does this trail lead to?" asked McCann.

"It goes up to a small native village in the hills," was Nova's reply.

"Does Tabi live there?"

"That is right."

McCann glanced down at the trail. "Looks as if an army had passed through here," he observed, pointing at the shoe imprints on the soft red soil.

"Those are the marks we made," said French.

They crossed the opening and entered the grove. The tall smooth-bark trees arose in an almost solid wall out of the matted jungle growth through which the trail passed. About ten yards further on Nova stopped and pointed at the ground. "Here is where I found Kolanov," he said.

The dense jungle growth had broken down and there were many footprints in the soft red earth. "You certainly made a mess of the clues," said McCann disgustedly.

"I made a complete search for clues before I allowed the men to come in," explained French, a little impatiently. "There weren't any."

McCann looked up and down the trail. The huge trunks of the trees blocked a direct view ahead, and no more than a hundred feet could be seen in either direction.

Nova moved on up the trail.

"Whoever shot Kolanov," said McCann in a low voice to French, "used six shots according to Nyamu. If there was only one bullet in Kolanov's body, five must have gone wild and some of the wild bullets must have hit the tree trunks. A man couldn't fire five shots through these trees without hitting one of them. Don't let Nova see you examining the tree trunks. Just keep your eyes open and see if there are any bullet marks on the trunks."

"Nova's coming back," said French.

"By the way," said McCann as Nova returned. "Did you hear the shots that were fired?"

"No, I didn't. I was too far away. I was coming up from Marienberg. The wind was blowing in the wrong direction for me to hear."

"Nyamu said that there were six shots fired," said McCann.

Nova's lips set but there was a look of surprise in his eyes. "Six shots?" he repeated and glanced at French.

"Six shots," said McCann.

"And Kolanov's gun hadn't been fired," said French.

Nova ran his hand over his face. McCann noticed that his

eyes had become veiled and that a suggestion of a smile had come to his lips.

"I think I can give you the answer to those shots," Nova said finally. "If you will excuse me I'll go up to the native village and have a talk to the chief."

"Sure, go ahead," said McCann and winked at French.

As Nova disappeared up the trail French said, "Why did you wink at me?"

"I want to look around when he isn't here," said McCann.

"You sound as though you suspect Nova."

"I suspect everyone," said McCann. "Come on, let's line up the trees in both directions and look 'em over."

After nearly an hour of intense search not a bullet mark had they to show for their efforts.

"Well, Jason," said McCann, "I guess we'd better go back to the house."

As they started back down the trail and had passed the spot where Kolanov had been found, McCann dropped behind French. He examined the sides of the trail closely as he went along and then something bright caught his eyes. He stopped and backed up slowly until he was abreast of the object that had attracted his attention. He moved quickly from the trail. Four shiny cartridge shells were scattered around the huge roots of an eucalyptus tree and the one that had caught his eye was held in the crotch of a small bush beside the tree.

"Jason," he called. "Come back here."

"Well, I'll be damned," exclaimed French as he saw the shells and picked one up. "Forty-fives and automatic."

"Right!"

"Five shots — five shells," mused French.

"Come on Jason," said McCann and gathered up the shells. "We're wasting our time."

"Have you—" began French.

"I have," interrupted McCann. "We're going down to your office. I want to check the firing pins in your arsenal collections."

"Arsenal collections? What arsenal collections?"

"The guns you rounded up from Kolanov's place and your police guns. I'd like to do some testing."

As they entered the police station the sergeant informed them that they had captured Tabi.

"Did he have his gun, Sergeant," asked McCann.

"Yes, Mr. McCann. But it wasn't the gun that killed Kolanov. We tested it. He must have used another."

McCann remembered the second gun Tabi had carried in a shoulder holster. He swore under his breath, telling himself he'd have to have a talk with

Nell about giving the guns back to Tabi.

"Where's Tabi now?" asked French.

"We've got him down below, sir. He hasn't talked yet, but he will. The boys are giving him the works."

"Quite right, Sergeant. Quite right," said French.

"I'd like to have comparisons made of the firing-pin marks from all the guns you have, including Tabi's, with the marks on the caps of those shells we found in the jungle."

"Sergeant," said French. "Take these shells and make the comparisons as McCann wishes." He gave the five shells to the sergeant.

"And now I'd like to see the arsenal," said McCann.

French unlocked a safe and spread the guns out on the table for McCann's inspection.

"Three forty-fives?" said McCann.

"That's right. This one belongs to Tabi. This one belongs to Nova and here is Kolanov's gun."

McCann picked up Nova's gun, racked the slide back and peered into the chamber. He became interested in the end of the barrel. The bluing was not worn off, and neither did the muzzle show the wear that the rest of the gun showed.

"Come on, Jason," he said, "we're going to fire a bullet from this gun."

"But we've already done that," protested French. "The rifling doesn't match with the bullet we took from Kolanov."

"I'm not interested in the rifling," said McCann as he got up and started toward the door. "I'm interested in the firing pin mark."

Comparison of the firing pin marks on the shells McCann had found in the jungle with the test shell showed the marks to be identical.

"You can arrest Nova for the murder of Kolanov," said McCann with a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"But—" began French.

"Don't worry, Jason," said McCann reassuringly. "I'll take full responsibility for his arrest. I'll even sign the complaint if you want me to. Just arrest him and I'll be back here within twenty-four hours with the proof."

Jason French shook his head dubiously. "You'd better have the proof when you come back," he warned.

"Don't let that gun out of your sight," cautioned McCann. "It's the one that was used to kill Kolanov."

"But—"

"I'm going down to the army barracks and borrow a mine detector," interrupted McCann. "Book Nova for anything you

want to—disturbing the peace—suspicion of murder—anything! Just get him and don't give him a chance to slip out of the country."

McCann arrived back in French's office exactly twenty-four hours later. French was quite worried.

"I hope you know what you're doing," he said, looking hard at McCann. "Nova's been raising hell ever since we arrested him yesterday on suspicion of murder. He's demanding counsel and threatening suit for false arrest."

"Don't worry about Nova," said McCann. "I'll handle him. Just let me have his gun and the five cartridges we found in the jungle."

French got the gun and shells and gave them to McCann.

"Have you got any live ammunition for this gun?" asked McCann. "I want to fill the clip."

"Live ammunition? Why?"

"I'll tell you later. Right now I want some live ammunition."

French gave him a box of 45's. "You don't have to be so damned secretive," grumbled French.

McCann grinned. "Bring Nova in," he said. "I'm ready to talk to him now."

While French was out of the room McCann removed the firing pin from the gun. Then he filled the clip with the live ammunition and racked a shell into the chamber. He placed the gun on the desk in front of him and leaned back in his chair and waited for French to return with Nova.

When French returned with Nova, Nova was white with rage. "I'll get you for this McCann," he shouted.

McCann's expression was that of an amused father who had reverted to the woodshed treatment after months of futile effort based on the egg-head theory of child control.

"Sit down Nova," he said quietly.

"I'll stand," said Nova and his teeth clicked as he said it.

McCann unlimbered himself and rose to his full height. He started toward Nova. "Sit down, Nova," he repeated and Nova sat down in the chair which McCann had placed in front of the desk.

McCann resumed his seat and reached into the desk drawer and brought out the five used cartridges. Slowly and deliberately he placed them upright in a straight line on the desk in front of Nova, keeping his eyes leveled on Nova's and watching his reactions.

The five shells stood like a palisade fence between him and Nova—evenly spaced and significant.

"Those eucalyptus trees are quite thick up in that grove where Kolanov was killed," said McCann.

Nova's eyelids narrowed but there was no other change of expression on his face.

"I was down at the bank cashing a check this morning, Nova," said McCann. "They showed me a very interesting cablegram."

Nova gave no indication that he heard McCann.

"It was a reply to the bank's cablegram to *your* bank in Madrid concerning the check you gave to Kolanov in payment of your partnership interest," explained McCann. "The cable said you were unknown and had no funds in the bank."

A pasty yellow began to spread over Nova's swarthy face. His hands gripped the arms of the chair until his knuckles appeared white.

"It never occurred to you that the bank would send a cable about your account, did it, Nova?" said McCann.

Nova's red tongue flashed over his dry lips.

McCann turned to French. "I forgot to tell you, Jason, that there was a provision in the partnership agreement that gave the entire holding to the survivor. Mr. Nova wasn't smart. He should have known better than to do a thing like that."

"All right," snarled Nova. "I admit that I thought I could juggle the bank account. He turned over the books for me to keep. He didn't know a thing about bookkeeping!"

McCann reached into the desk drawer and brought out Nova's automatic. He placed it on the desk in front of Nova—just back of the row of shells.

"Ever see this gun before?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Nova. "It's mine."

"How long have you owned it?"

"Several years."

"Have you owned *all* of it for several years?"

Nova's eyes narrowed. "*All* of it?" he repeated.

McCann reached into his pocket and brought out an automatic pistol barrel. He placed it on the desk beside the pistol without comment and looked directly into Nova's eyes.

"How far ahead of you was Kolanov when he was shot?" he asked.

Nova's face twitched. He glanced down at the gun.

McCann pointed at the empty cartridges. "Do you know where I found these cartridges, Nova?" he asked and then continued without waiting for Nova to reply. "I found them beside the roots of a eucalyptus tree not far from the place where Kolanov was killed. We made a test firing with your gun and the firing pin marks are the same on these shells as those on the test cartridges."

Nova's jugular vein began to bulge and the veins on his fore-

head stood out like knotted threads beneath his skin. His breathing became faster.

"I was out shooting a few days ago and shot at a deer," he managed to say.

"Was the deer on the trail?" asked McCann.

"It was."

"Did all your bullets hit the deer?"

"I don't think I hit him. He was too far away and he was running."

"Chief French and I examined all the tree trunks in the vicinity and there were no bullet marks on them," said McCann, and leaned back in his chair.

Nova's eyes gave him the appearance of a cornered rat. McCann picked up the pistol barrel. "I want you to remove the present barrel in that gun, Nova," he ordered, "and then put this barrel in its place."

Nova's face began to twitch again and his red tongue flashed out over his red lips.

"Go ahead, Nova," urged McCann. "It will fit. I tried it."

McCann saw Nova's batlike ears move slightly as he took the barrel. Nova laid the barrel on the table and picked up the gun. His movements were like those of a jaguar advancing towards its prey. He pulled the slide to the rear and the live cartridge flew out on the floor. Another shell was ready to be snapped into the chamber. He tensed for a moment, then released the slide and let the shell slip into the barrel. He was on his feet instantaneously and had both McCann and French covered.

"Don't move, either of you, or I'll drill both of you!" he warned in a cold voice. He started to back slowly toward the door. McCann moved like a flash and blocked his exit. Nova hesitated momentarily and then pointed his pistol directly at McCann's heart.

McCann moved slowly toward him, eyes leveled and piercing. "Put down that gun, Nova," he ordered in an ordinary tone of voice. A lazy grin had begun to widen his lip lines.

"Stay where you are!" warned Nova.

McCann continued his slow advance. Nova pulled the trigger. There was only the click of the hammer. Nova racked another shell into the barrel and pulled the trigger again. There was another click and McCann's long arm shot out like a sledgehammer and his fist connected with Nova's chin.

Nova's eyes crossed and he swayed drunkenly. McCann grabbed the pistol and twisted his arm backward and upward. Nova pitched headlong and his face rubbed the rough boards of the floor. French came to McCann's assistance and they handcuffed Nova and dumped him into a chair.

"There's your murderer of Kolanov," McCann told French, hitched his breeches up over his narrow hips and started for the door.

"Where you going?" demanded French.

"I'm going back to Shanghai Nell's," McCann said with a twinkle in his eyes. "Gotta report to her. She's interested in my welfare."

"Wait until we book Nova and I'll go with you and buy the drinks. I owe you that much!"

"You buy the drinks and then fade," grinned McCann. "Nell and I have a lot of private talking to do and we just don't like to have a police guard around when we're talking."

When he arrived at Nell's, French ordered drinks and Nell brought them personally to their table. "Mind if I join you?" she asked.

French jumped to his feet but Archie slumped further down in his chair. "I will consider it an honor, Nell," he said and scowled down at Archie. "And," he added, "we'll drink a toast to the laziest bum on the beach —Archibald Sylvester Brewster McCann."

"He's lazy. He's shiftless. He's worthless. He's no good when it comes to work, but he's no bum," said Nell and ran her hand through McCann's tousled hair.

French smiled. "Well, I can testify that Archie's got that which we in polite society would call intestinal fortitude, but in my language just plain 'guts.'"

"Tell me what happened," urged Nell.

"Yes, sir, Archie's got guts! Imagine anyone walking right into a loaded gun held by a killer—"

"Save the applesauce, Jason," McCann cut in with an impatient slicing movement of his hand. "I had removed the firing pin from the gun when you were out of the room. I wanted Nova to give himself away. That gimmick with the extra barrel did the trick."

"Where did you get that extra barrel," inquired French curiously. "Is it actually Nova's?"

McCann grinned and reached into his pocket. He dropped Nova's gun on the table. "I knew you'd be asking questions," he said and pulled back the slide. "When I first pulled back the slide, I noticed that the barrel was a new one and that the bluing hadn't been worn off and also, that the end of the muzzle wasn't worn. That gave me a hunch—"

"He's my boy," smiled Nell and patted his hand fondly.

"And what was your hunch," urged French.

"Well, I figured that Nova had shot Kolanov with the regular barrel and then had switched barrels and fired the five shots

into the ground, figuring that Tabi, who had threatened Kolanov in front of me, would take the rap. The business of switching barrels would account for the interval between the one shot and the five shots that Nyamu told us about."

"But why the other shots," questioned French. "Why not just switch the barrels and let it go at that."

"Nova probably wanted to show that his gun wasn't new," explained Archie. "I imagine that he thought the firing would burn off the bluing and cover up the barrel's newness. But it didn't."

"I'll say it didn't," agreed French. "But—where is the regular barrel?"

"I left it with the boys in the lab before we came down here. They are going to make some test firings with that barrel. I'll lay you ten to one the riflings on the bullets fired from it will be identical with the rifling on the bullet taken from Kolanov's body."

"There's just one thing I'd like to know," said French. "How in the devil did you find that barrel?"

"Oh, I just borrowed a mine detector and a couple of the boys down at the army barracks, that's all."

"Well—" urged French.

"We went back to the jungle and the mine detector located the barrel. It was buried between the roots of a sour plum tree."

"Hmm. Quite logical, quite logical," said French approvingly.

"And to be just as logical, why don't you finish your drink and beat it," invited McCann and winked at Nell.

French took the hint, gulped his whiskey and took his leave.

McCann looked at Nell curiously.

"Why are you looking at me that way?" she asked.

McCann grinned. "I was trying to make up my mind," he said.

"About what?"

"A hammock on my front porch in Tambu and—"

Nell got up and started slowly toward her quarters at the rear of the pub. She looked back at McCann, who grinned and laboriously unlimbered himself and followed her.

The hot sticky air of the jungle pressed down into the streets of the waterfront and the dull and measured rhythm of the native drums sounded like pulse beats in the motionless air, and the door closed the noises of the pub from their ears as they disappeared into the unpublished phase of the life of Archibald Sylvester Brewster McCann.

a tooth for a tooth

by . . . Peter Fraser

A fingerprint on a murder weapon may simplify a policeman's task. But there's a far more ingenious way of cooking a killer's goose.

IT WAS to be the young man's first attempt at burglary and for some weeks he had practiced doing everything in gloves. He had even eaten his meals in gloves and was scarcely aware of them any more.

The whole caper would be a pushover, as easy as falling off a log and far less painful, for he had studied meticulously the nightly routine of the house on the edge of Hampstead Heath. First the old manservant locked and bolted the front door and then, making his way towards the garden door, he entered each of the three ground floor rooms to make certain that all the windows were properly fastened and shuttered. Having satisfied himself on that point, he locked all three of the doors on the outside, the last being the kitchen which overlooked the garden at the back of the house.

Then he opened the garden door to put out the cat before descending into the cellar to make up the furnace. Two or three minutes later he reappeared

Deeds of dark violence take place most anywhere, but a few seem peculiarly inseparable from the English countryside and an English accent. The young man of this story, for instance, would have been a quite different kind of burglar had his infamous conduct resulted in his arrest on this side of the Atlantic. We can't explain why, exactly. We do know that such fascinating intangibles add variety and spice to mystery fiction. Here the blend is much to our liking.

to summon the cat from the garden, to lock and bolt the garden door and, clasping the cat to his bosom with one hand, to go upstairs to his bedroom after carefully switching off all the electric lights . . .

THE BURGLAR, who had been waiting in the garden, made his way quickly into the house while the servant was in the cellar and, quietly unlocking the kitchen door, slipped inside.

He heard the old man calling for Macavity, the cat, and the sounds of his bolting and chaining the door to the garden. He waited in sudden terror until the old man and Macavity had passed the kitchen door to go upstairs. Then he settled down to wait until Mr. Fry, the householder, who slept as he well knew in the room immediately above the kitchen, stopped moving about.

A sudden sound behind him made him twist around in fright. He almost laughed out loud when he realized it was only the refrigerator automatically giving itself a boost. It reminded him that he was hungry. He switched on the light to investigate the possibilities of a snack.

Some minutes later he had just taken the first satisfying bite from a piece of bread and cheddar cheese when the door behind him opened and there stood the manservant gaping at him. Blindly he seized a rolling-pin, struck the old man down and, fumbling with the bolts of the garden door, was into the garden, over the fence and running away across the heath . . .

MR. FRY was a fine looking elderly man, wearing a silk-dressing gown over thick flannel pyjamas.

"I'd gone up to bed before my servant," he told Detective-Sergeant Broadwood. "Poor old Eliot! He served me well for over twenty years. I'm sorry, Sergeant; this is not the time for sentiment." He paused for a moment. "I heard Eliot locking up as usual, then came the sounds of his nightly contest with the furnace, then his cries for Macavity—his mystery cat, Sergeant."

"Pardon, sir?"

"A literary allusion, Sergeant. Oddly enough Macavity is always there and has no criminal tendencies. Now where was I—? Oh yes. After I'd heard him locking the garden door, I heard him passing my bedroom door on the way to his own. I undressed slowly and before I got into bed, drew my curtains back as usual. I like the fresh night air. From my window I could see that Eliot had left a light on in the kitchen and that part of the garden beneath me was brightly illuminated. I went along the passage to his room and told him

to go down and turn off the light.

"I was mildly surprised to hear, a few minutes later, someone fumbling noisily at the bolts of the garden door. I called downstairs, 'What the devil are you up to, Eliot?' There was no answer, so I went downstairs. There was Eliot lying on the floor in the kitchen doorway. His head was— Well, you saw it, Sergeant."

Broadwood nodded grimly.

"He died almost at once," added Mr. Fry.

"Almost at once, sir? Did he say anything?"

"Yes, Sergeant, he did." Mr. Fry's expression was puzzled. "He said, 'You done it.' "

"You done it, sir?" asked Broadwood.

"Yes. I suppose he meant I'd sent him downstairs to—to his death."

Sergeant Broadwood shook his head slightly. Then he asked briskly: "What object could a burglar have in coming here, sir?"

"I've got a considerable collection of seventeenth and early eighteenth century silver. It's my hobby and my one investment. Much of it is in daily use. This —er—crib is certainly worth cracking. But nothing is missing, Sergeant."

Broadwood, who had deduced correctly that the murderous burglar had slipped into the house while Eliot was stoking the furnace, had two clues. One was tangible and definite, the other possible and oral. The one could corroborate the efficacy of the other and both could overcome together the absence of finger-prints.

So, following the oral clue, he made inquiries of Eliot's friends and relatives and discovered a nephew, an orphaned son of the old man's sister who had married one Morley. Young Morley had —with Mr. Fry's permission— lived in the house with his uncle for some months when Mr. Fry was abroad and had helped him keep the collection of silver clean.

Now he was obviously down on his luck, being temporarily unemployed, a state which with him was almost permanent.

Broadwood sat him down in his office and gave him tea and a cheese sandwich.

"You've got nothing on me," said Morley and proceeded to explain that he had an alibi for the time of his uncle Eliot's murder. He had been playing cards with three friends, whose integrity Broadwood gravely doubted. He did not however make any comment, but rose from behind his desk and opened the door of his office.

"Thanks, Morley," he said.

"You mean— I can go?" Morley gulped on a piece of bread and cheese. "I haven't finished my tea."

"Leave your tea and that sandwich and—" Broadwood raised his voice, "let me get on with my work, my lad."

Morley took his departure . . .

"WELL, Inspector, there we are, sir," said Broadwood a little while later, putting two objects down on his superior officer's desk. "Exhibit One: the plaster cast of the bite marks in the bread and cheese found in Mr. Fry's kitchen. Exhibit Two: ditto of ditto in the sandwich Morley had part of on the Government this afternoon. Identical. See? And I know where I can pick young Morley up."

"Very neat, Sergeant, very neat indeed," said the inspector. "The public doesn't know that teeth and bite marks are as useful to us as fingerprints. Each has its own individual characteristics and none is the same as another. Good show, Broadwood. But—how did you get onto this Morley character in the first place? I'd really like to know."

"Eliot told Fry it was him, sir, before he died."

"But he only said, 'You done it,' didn't he?"

"No, sir, begging your pardon, he couldn't have meant that. Now I'm a Cockney, like old Eliot was and what he said was 'Ugh done it,' see? Just make out the warrant for the arrest of Hugh Morley, Inspector, if you please."

Among the Contributors to Next Month's SAINT *will be*

LESLIE CHARTERIS,
with "The Unescapable Word"

ARNOLD BENNETT,
with "The Secret Murderer"

RAOUL WHITFIELD,
with "Murder in Hollywood"

SAX ROHMER,
with "The Owl Hoots Twice"

WALT SHELDON,
with "Johnny Pringle, Detective"

THEODORE STURGEON,
with "Dead Dames Don't Dial"

the code of the rat

by . . . George Fielding Eliot

Slim would have had no scruples at all about running off with another man's wife. But a crook without honor can rat on himself.

MATT VALLONE sat on the roof of K. & G. car No. 43455, his skinny legs dangling over the side, his soul writhing in torment. Directly below him, his fellow convicts of Keeper Vogel's gang were lugging cement sacks out of the car and across the loading dock into the shed. Matt, clipboard and pencil in hand, was checking.

It was an easy job, sitting there in the sunshine making little groups of four uprights and one diagonal cross mark. A lot easier than shouldering 94-pound sacks of cement. Matt had been grateful to Slim Kramer, the head checker in the construction office, for picking him to fill in as substitute checker when Slim had other things to attend to. Slim had been doing that off and on for a month now, ever since these car-load lots of cement for the new cell-block had started coming in through the railroad gate in the east wall at fairly frequent intervals.

"Think nothin' of it, kid," Slim had said with his easy smile.

When an internationally famous military expert covers a one-man prison break on a box-car siding, amidst cement-lugging gangs of convicts, you'd be well-advised to hold your breath! Just in general, we mean. In Major George Fielding Eliot's case specifically only because he has long been a mystery writer whose stories invariably pack what is slangily called "a wallop." We've always rather liked the term, and we make no apologies whatever for repeating it here.

"Ain't you'n'me always been pals?"

But yesterday—Sunday afternoon—out in the big prison yard, Slim had made clear to Matt the real reason for his favors.

Slim Kramer was going to crash out of stir—this morning. In this very box-car. He was inside the car—safely out of Vogel's sight—right this minute, making his final preparations. None of the sweating, cement-covered cons would pay any attention to him, of course. They couldn't care less what Slim was doing, puttering around in there.

Slim was a big shot, a "politician", who ate on the range line and was a law unto himself. All the cement-luggers wanted was to finish the job in time to get a shower before the 11:30 count—a prospect which Vogel always held out to them as bait to get the car unloaded promptly before the switch engine came to take it away.

Slim had counted on all that. He had his plan worked out to the last detail. He meant to do everything himself except one thing that he couldn't do—which was why he'd had to take Matt into his confidence.

And Matt Vallone, like a sucker, had promised to help.

It wasn't till afterward, alone in his cell, that a horrible possibility had flashed into his mind, taken root there and become sickening conviction.

He could still hear Slim's self-satisfied chuckle, could still remember just what Slim had said.

"I ain't pullin' no knot-head trick like tryin' to lam outa the State, either. I got it fixed how to get to Lanchester. I got connections, kid, you know that. When I get to Lanchester, I'm holin' up—right there—till the bulls get tired o' lookin' for me. I know just the place, too—nice and snug."

Matt could still see the glitter of wicked amusement in Slim's dark eyes as he'd said that, looking sideways at Matt—Matt, the sucker, who was too dumb to catch wise.

Slim wasn't capable of understanding that when you loved anybody as much as Matt loved Rosa, you were very quick on the uptake about anything that touched her.

Matt was as sure as though he'd been able to look right into Slim's mind that Slim meant to hole up in Rosa's house. Whether Rosa liked it or not. It was an extra twist to Matt's agony that he wasn't too sure that Rosa mightn't learn to like it.

Rose had been Slim Kramer's girl, once, long ago. Slim, his fortunes rocketing upward in Lanchester's interlocking rackets, had ditched her for a succession of flashier numbers.

Matt, humbly grateful for the opportunity, had sought to comfort Rosa, had spoken to her of

marriage and of his quitting his minor chores with Slim's mob to get a job and go straight. Rosa had listened, Rosa had promised. They'd gone as far as to make the down payment on a little house, in Rosa's name—her real name, not the one she used in the night-club where she danced. She'd even quit the night-club—and then the inevitable "one more caper" came along. One last chance to make a stake.

Matt had agreed to drive the getaway car while Slim and a couple of other hoods stuck up a poker game in the back room of Madigan's cafe. But some joker had flipped the light switch, and Slim, who was cursed by a pathological terror of darkness—especially sudden darkness—had gone off his rocker and started shooting in frenzied panic.

Nobody was killed, but two men were wounded, and the cops gathered in the whole mob. Slim went up for ten-to-twenty-five, as a three-time loser; Matt and the other boys got one-to-ten raps. Rosa had said she'd wait.

That had been two years ago. Rosa's letters had come regularly. She'd gone to business school. She had a job as a secretary. She was keeping up the payments on the house. She'd be there waiting when Matt got out. Reading between the lines, Matt understood happily that the cops had never caught on about how Rosa Paciale had once been Rosaline Palliser, fire-ball dancer and Slim Kramer's girl.

Fool that he was, he'd even shown one or two of these letters to Slim, confident that Slim would be glad to know that Rosa was all right. And anyway, what could Slim, with that ten-to-twenty-five slug hung on him, do about it if he wasn't glad? Matt hadn't told Slim, of course, what Rosa had said, time and again: "You're sweet, Matt, and I'll try to make you a good wife. But it's going to be tough forgetting Slim."

Slim had just sneered at the letters. But he'd remembered. Matt was as sure of that as he was that he was sitting there sweating it out on the edge of that box-car. Rosa's little house would look to Slim like a made-to-order hide-out. With trimmings.

Matt's soul writhed as he thought about what the trimmings might include. But it wasn't only jealousy that tortured him now. Matt didn't share Slim's contempt for cops. They might track Slim to Rosa's house—and Slim might decide to shoot it out. He'd have a gun by that time. He might even use Rosa as a shield against police bullets.

This had to happen when Matt was within a month of parole—just a month—with Rosa waiting.

One more Matt wrestled with the surging impulse to jump down off that car-roof, walk over to Vogel—lounging there in the

shade by the end of the shed—and tell him what Slim Kramer was doing inside the car. That would fix Slim's clock.

But Matt couldn't do it. He'd thought of doing it, all through the sleepless hours of the night. At the brink of decision, he recoiled. He couldn't turn rat. By the code of the community in which he lived, a rat was a thing so despicable as to be no longer human.

Sure, he was through with rackets and prisons, once he got out of here. But he wasn't out yet, the gray loyalties of the gray masses were still his loyalties. Beyond that, he knew he'd be marked for vengeance if he turned Slim in. Slim hadn't been kidding when he said he had connections.

So Matt had made a compromise with the code. He's done the best he could. He hoped it would be good enough—for himself, but most of all for Rosa. It was almost time to find out.

His little blocks of check-marks now filled fifteen lines, ten blocks to the line. That meant that 750 sacks of cement were out of the car. There wouldn't be more than a hundred left: perhaps as few as fifty.

Slim was going to knock twice on the roof of the car when the last sacks were being shouldered. That would be the signal for Matt to drop down from the roof to the loading-dock, glance inside the car, make the last check-marks on the list and walk carelessly toward Vogel, holding out the clip-board for the keeper to initial.

This Slim had tried out in person, a couple of times, the result being that lazy, easygoing Vogel didn't walk over to the open door of the car and look inside himself, as he ought to have done. If he did that this time, he might catch Slim in the act of making his final move—putting in place the canvas curtain across the end of the car.

Stalling Vogel was the one thing that Slim couldn't do for himself—the one thing Matt had to do for him.

Of course the guard at the railroad gate would look inside the car, when the switch-engine got it there. That was what the canvas curtain was for.

Slim had made the curtain himself, out of some old canvas which had been used to cover piles of cement while they were building the shed. Slim, who had once been—among other things—a scene painter, had done a highly convincing job—or so he said.

"There ain't no dumb guard," he'd assured Matt, "who'll be able to tell, just by stickin' his head through the car door, that he's lookin' at a piece of canvas hangin' two feet from the end of the car instead of at solid wood. When he makes his quick

inspection I'll be standin' behind that canvas laughin'."

Slim had been very pleased with himself. The curtain and its wooden framework had been tailored to fit car No. 43455, which shuttled back and forth in the way-freight between the prison spur-track and the cement-works forty miles up the branch line. Slim had plenty of time to open the car door and slide his rolled-up curtain and the pieces of the frame-work in on top of the load before Vogel's gang arrived. Then as the sacks were removed from that end of the car, Slim could go to work.

Vogel wasn't responsible for Slim. Slim's boss was the State engineer in charge of construction, who'd be busy all day up at the cell-block site with the surveyors and the excavating gang. Slim's job was to check arriving supplies; and Slim had gotten Vogel accustomed to seeing Matt doing that. Matt had to admit that Slim had thought of everything. Even his own weakness.

"When I painted them dark lines to look like cracks between the boards," Slim had said, "I cut me some slits to let a little light come through, so's I won't be cooped up in the dark. I don't like the dark, Matt. I get nervous in the dark. You know that."

Yeah, thought Matt, *I got reason to know it.*

775 sacks, said the check-marks. Up by the railroad gate, a yammering vibration came to Matt's ears: the switch-engine was here. It was Warden Terhune's rule that the engine had to arrive with the loaded car at eight a.m. on the dot, before any working gangs were in the yard, depart immediately and return for the empty at eleven a.m. This occasioned some heart-burnings on the part of the Deer Falls yardmaster, as it balled up his switching schedules. But Terhune had his way, as he usually did. He wasn't having Diesel locomotives banging in and out of his walls at any odd hour. This rigid time-schedule was part of Slim's scheme.

Matt threw a quick glance over his shoulder. They were opening the big gate to let the engine in. The check-sheet showed 800 sacks out of the car. There couldn't be many left. 850 was tops.

Tension knotted, cold and quivery, in Matt's stomach. His pencil moved steadily. 810—815—820—825—

He leaned back and with one furtive hand picked up the tin can that stood behind him on the car roof and tossed it over the farther edge. Whatever sound it made when it landed on the ground was covered by the rumbling approach of the Diesel.

830—835—

The big yellow locomotive was trundling down the spur-track, the engineer leaning from his

window, a brakeman on the footboard. On the balcony of the tower over the railroad gate, a guard stood, watching carefully to make sure no con tried to sneak aboard that engine, or communicate with the crew. Another guard waited by the open gate. The outer gate, of course, had been closed before this inner one was opened.

840—Two dull thumps sounded on the inner side of the roof. Matt stuck his pencil behind his ear and the clip-board under his arm. He slid forward and dropped to the planks of the loading dock. Two more sack-bearers went past. Matt took a gander inside the car—through the sun-speckled cement dust he saw a bare floor, bare car-ends—

He gulped. The curtain was already in place. Slim must've let it roll down the instant the last con had turned his back. It was a good job, all right. Looked just like boards. A guard expecting to see an empty car would see just that and nothing else.

Matt made two final check marks on his sheet and walked toward Vogel, who was putting his foot on a cigarette which he had no business to be smoking on duty.

"All okay, Vallone?" yelled the chubby keeper above the clank and thunder of the approaching engine. He took the clip-board, glanced at it.

"Okay, sir," Matt yelled back.

"All right, you guys! Line up for the bath-house!" shouted Vogel to his cement-powdered gang.

Ker-lunk went the coupling, and the empty car shuddered under the impact. The brakeman, without bothering to hook up the air-hose, grabbed the side-ladder, and waved his arm. The Diesel's yammering accelerated. The car jerked forward on its 500-yard trip along the spur track to the gate.

Vogel, standing on the end of the loading dock, counted the weary, denim-clad figures plodding past him. 25-26-27—He nodded. Twenty-seven men he'd checked out, twenty-seven men he'd check back in. That was the end of Keeper Vogel's morning responsibility.

Matt, trudging at the tail of the file, watched the engine and car rumbling along the spur-track toward the gate, as he had watched the same performance a dozen times before. There was a slight upgrade and, as always, the engineer poured on a little power, gaining speed. He apparently liked to slap on the brakes and do a quick stop at the gate. Maybe he thought this made the guards nervous.

Now—now.

Matt's stomach was turning over.

Brake shoes shrieked on steel tires. The engine shuddered to a stop, and the car, its brakes not

connected, smacked ahead a little, taking up the slack of the coupling.

And with that impact, the open door of box-car No. 43455 slammed shut.

Matt sucked in a long quivering breath. So far—

The waiting guard was running toward that closed door. Now he was tugging at it. It seemed to be stuck.

Matt's gang was almost to the entrance of the central hall. He lagged as much as he could. He had to know—

Matt saw the guard jump back from the car as though startled by some sound inside. He was waving an arm, then pointing at the car. Instantly the guard on the tower balcony whirled and dived into the tower, grabbing at something on the wall—a telephone.

A moment later he came into sight at the base of the tower, rifle in hand. The brakeman was helping the other guard pry at the door.

It rolled back a couple of feet, and Slim Kramer lurched out through the dark opening and into the arms of the waiting guards.

"What the hell's goin' on there?" grunted Vogel, staring.

"Dunno," answered Matt Vallone. He managed to keep his voice steady, though he was trembling with happy excitement.

Slim had counted on that door staying open, as it always had before. The train crew wouldn't bother to close it again till it was closed on another load of cement. The rollers from which it hung hadn't been lubricated for a long time: It took quite a little to move that door. No ordinary jolt would budge it an inch.

Unless, of course, somebody were to take the trouble to oil the track on which the rollers moved. A man sitting on top of a car is in a good position to do things like that. He can even find a chance to stick a piece of wood under the far end of the roller-path so that when the door slams shut it jams and takes a little time to pry open again.

It had been easy for Matt to pick up a can of motor-oil and some grease when he went into the store-room to get his clipboard and pencil. Bits of lumber were lying around everywhere. Vogel hadn't noticed. Any more than he'd noticed how Matt kept shifting his position on the roof of No. 43455.

"All right, get inside, if you want a bath," barked Vogel at his gang.

The guards were leading Slim Kramer—a very dejected, shuffling Slim—across the yard toward the entrance to the administration building. Matt Vallone knew that was the last he'd see of Slim. Slim would still be in isolation when Matt walked

out of the front gate, a month from now.

Walked out to freedom—and Rosa.

Matt trudged along the tiled hall toward the bath-house, his soul at rest, his conscience easy. His code forbade him to rat on another con. But there was nothing in Matt's book that said you couldn't fix things so a man might rat on himself.

Slim Kramer, his nerves at high tension, hadn't been able to take sudden darkness—unexplained darkness—any more than he'd been able to take it in Madigan's back room that time.

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PLEASE PRINT SD 67

velvet johnnie went to prison

by . . . Peter Cheyney

The individual touch was Velvet Johnnie's specialty. But his trademark on every aspect of the crime cast a chill double shadow.

CHIEF Detective-Inspector Gringall stepped quietly into the room of his subordinate, Detective-Sergeant Hone, closed the door behind him and stood with his back to it.

He was smiling almost wistfully. He said: "You know what today is, don't you, Hone? It's the second of February."

Hone looked up. He said wearily: "Yes, I know, Mr. Gringall. Just three years ago on the second of February an old boy called Cranleigh was murdered over in the South-East district. He was reputed to be a man with money. In the early hours of the morning someone broke into the house and tried to blow the safe. They made a mess of it. The theory was that Cranleigh came down in the middle of it, and the burglar hit him over the head with an iron bar—probably a crow-bar. That was three years ago, sir. You gave the case to me to make the usual routine inquiries and nothing's happened up to date."

Few mystery writers have a wider popular following than Peter Cheyney on both sides of the Atlantic. His accomplished and graceful style and trenchant characterization have made such masterpieces as LADIES WON'T WAIT and ONE OF THOSE THINGS *the brightly-jacketed companions, on library shelves, of E. S. Gardner's Perry Mason. He has written many unusual short stories, but it would be hard to surpass this one in the lightly exciting inventiveness of its assault on criminal duplicity and malice as unvegetable as a basilisk's stare.*

"That's right, Hone," said Gringall. "Are you still doing anything about it or have you forgotten it?"

Hone shook his head. "I haven't forgotten it, Mr. Gringall. I carry the date forward from year to year, but it's one of those cases. There was no evidence—not a thing. I tried every lead in the case, everything that looked promising. So what do I do? I'm not psychic."

Gringall grinned. "I never thought you were. You remember my original idea?"

Hone nodded. "I remember it. You thought that Whaley—the boy they call 'The Voice'—had had a hand in it. You wanted me to check up on where he was on that night—the night of the first of February, and he said he didn't know. I thought that was pretty reasonable."

Gringall raised his eyebrows.

"He put it to me," said Hone, "that if you asked ninety-nine men out of a hundred they couldn't tell you what they were doing on a night nine months before. It was not surprising that *he* couldn't."

Gringall said: "You believed him."

Hone shrugged his shoulders. "What does it matter whether I believed him or not? We knew Whaley to be a crook. He still is. But we've got nothing on him. He's a clever lad, that one. We'd got nothing else to tie him in with the murder, so what could I do? Incidentally, it struck me that he was telling the truth. If I asked you suddenly out of the blue nine months after a murder what you were doing on the night, I'd think it reasonable if you couldn't tell me."

Gringall said: "Well, there's a certain amount of sense in what you say. But don't let's forget that Cranleigh case. Remember Velvet Johnnie?"

Hone nodded. "Velvet's coming out next week. There was another clever guy. But he slipped up badly the last time—on that insurance office job in Long Acre. A very neat job. He got away with a couple of thousand that night, but he made one bad slip. He's coming out next Tuesday."

Gringall said: "You know, when I went down to look at that place of Cranleigh's, all the technique looked like Velvet Johnnie. The way the front door was opened, the back doors wedged, the windows and curtains fixed."

Hone spread his hands. "All right, sir. So it looked like Velvet Johnnie. Do you suppose I didn't think about that? But there was nothing to connect him with the murder, and he had an alibi for that night."

Gringall asked: "Precisely what was the alibi?"

"He was with his girl—Lily Malone," said Hone.

Gringall asked: "Did anybody see him there?"

"No," said Hone. "You might think she was telling a lie, but the jury wouldn't. That alibi would let Velvet out. Nobody's got anything against Lily Malone, and Velvet's a damned good cracksman. But I don't honestly think he's a murderer."

Gringall said: "How would you know? They've all got to start some time."

Hone sighed. "Look, Mr. Gringall . . . are you telling me to re-open this thing? If so, where do I start and what do I do?"

Gringall said: "I'm not telling you to do anything, Hone. But don't forget this case. Old Cranleigh was murdered three years ago and because we haven't been able to do anything about it there's no reason why we should forget it."

Hone said sarcastically: "I won't forget it, Mr. Gringall, I promise you. And how do I not forget it? Do I go and see Whaley again and ask him what he was doing on that night, and listen to him telling me he can't remember?"

Gringall said: "So long as you don't forget a thing something might turn up. Don't worry about it, Hone. Just don't forget it." He smiled cheerfully and went out of the office.

Hone said angrily to himself: "Damn. Every year the same story! What the hell am *I* supposed to do?"

He got up and put on his hat, his eyes narrowed in resentment, and stalked out.

Hone went into the saloon bar at the bottom of Whitehall. He ordered a whiskey and soda. He sat there, thinking about Gringall and the Cranleigh murder. He was fed up generally. He stopped half-way through his drink because, over the glass partition between the saloon and private bars, came a voice that Hone remembered very well. It was Whaley's voice.

The voice said: "I've no complaints about last night. I've always been fond of my birthdays, but yesterday was the best one I've had. My fortieth birthday. Well, here's to everybody!"

Hone heard some more conversation and the sound of glasses being put on the bar. He began to walk slowly back towards Scotland Yard. He decided to pay a little visit to Whaley at his home . . .

WHALEY stood just inside the open door looking at Hone. He was smiling cheerfully. He said: "Hello, Mr. Hone. I'm glad to see you again."

Hone said: "Are you? Well, could I come in? I want to have a little talk with you."

"Sure!" said Whaley. He stood looking at Hone amiably.

Whaley was tall, slim, and

well-dressed in a cheap sort of way. The shoulders of his coat were too wide, the waist too narrow. He was good-looking and he knew it. He was the sort of man that women found very attractive.

Whaley stood aside. He shut the door behind Hone and then led the way into a sitting-room on the right of the passageway.

He said: "Sit down, Mr. Hone. You wouldn't like a drink I suppose?"

Hone said: "No." He sat down in a chair on one side of the fireplace. Whaley sat in the other chair.

Hone went on: "I don't want to waste any time, Whaley. Yesterday, or rather today—because it was in the early hours of the morning—is the anniversary of the Cranleigh murder three years ago. Remember?"

Whaley raised his eyebrows whimsically. "Of course I remember. We've talked about that before, Mr. Hone, haven't we?"

Hone said: "Yes—and I'm talking about it again. You can't have forgotten that nine months after that murder I came to see you. I came to see you because Detective-Inspector Gringall, who was in charge of the case, had an idea that the job looked like Velvet Johnnie. And he knew that you and Velvet Johnnie had done plenty of jobs together. Well, I know that to see a man nine months after a job isn't fair to him or to me. I wanted to know what you were doing on the night of the murder. Not b e c a u s e anybody thought you'd committed it, understand? *I* simply thought asking you would be the best way of getting a line on Velvet Johnnie."

Whaley said: "I can't imagine what you wanted a line on him for. I thought he had an alibi."

"Yes," said Hone, "he had a very good alibi. And *you* weren't able to tell me what you were doing on that particular night because you couldn't remember."

"Yes, I know. And I was right, wasn't I?"

Hone said: "Circumstances alter cases. I went into the Lord Nelson this morning for a drink. You were in the private bar. I heard you talking." Hone smiled at Whaley. "See what I mean?"

Whaley shook his head. "No, I don't."

Hone said: "The night on which that murder was committed was your birthday, wasn't it? And it might have been nine months after the job when I saw you. I couldn't see you before because you were somewhere abroad—Australia, if I'm not mistaken. But don't tell me you didn't remember what you'd been doing on your last birthday. Now do you understand?"

There was a long silence. Then Whaley said: "Yes, I understand perfectly."

Hone went on: "Then another idea occurred to me. When I discovered this morning that yesterday was your birthday I wondered if I could find a good reason why you wouldn't tell what you'd been doing on the morning of the murder three years ago. Then it occurred to me that a good reason might be that you knew who *did* commit the murder.

"Well, if you'd told me where you were at the time of the murder I might have been able to get at the actual killer through you. Maybe you were being loyal to somebody, Whaley. So you thought the best thing you could say was that you couldn't remember what you were doing. You didn't think I'd ever discover that it was your birthday."

Whaley said nothing. He brought a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, extracted one and took a long time over lighting it with a very showy lighter. He sat motionless for a moment, looking into the fire.

Hone said: "Well, why don't you do some talking?"

Whaley inhaled deeply, threw the cigarette into the fire and expelled the smoke through his nostrils.

He said: "Look, I'm no mug, Mr. Hone. It's three years since that murder. You got on to me nine months afterwards. I told you I didn't know what I was doing that night and in the early morning hours, and now you're back again, so I'm thinking . . ."

Hone asked quietly: "What are you thinking, Whaley?"

Whaley said: "Maybe it's no good being loyal to your pals. Maybe you only get yourself in bad with the police. I wouldn't like to do that."

Hone said nothing.

Whaley went on: "Look, Mr. Hone, I'd like to think this thing out a bit more. Not because I had anything to do with that job, because I hadn't. But I hate to call the turn on a pal."

"I see. Well, do all the thinking you want, Whaley. When do you think you'd like to talk to me?"

Whaley shrugged his shoulders. "You come round here tomorrow night about seven o'clock—if that'll suit you. Maybe I'll have something to tell you then."

Hone said: "All right. I'll be here at seven tomorrow evening. Good night, Whaley."

Whaley said good night. He took Hone out into the hallway and held the door open for him. Then he went back to the sitting-room. He lit another cigarette. When he'd smoked it he got up, put on his hat and overcoat and began to walk towards Waterloo Bridge. Halfway there he hailed a taxicab. He thought he was tired of walking.

When the front door bell of the flat rang Lily Malone put

down her needlework, got up and walked into the hall.

Lily Malone had something. She was tall and slender, but curved in all the right places. She had large blue eyes and very attractive, naturally blonde hair. She had something else too—in her walk, and the way she put her feet on the ground—that peculiar quality of allure that most women would give anything to possess.

She opened the door, her face lighting up as she recognized Whaley.

He grinned at her. "Hello, Lily."

She said: "Hello. What's cooking?"

He said: "I'd like to talk to you, baby."

She nodded.

Whaley followed her into the cozy sitting-room and took a chair opposite the fireplace.

She asked: "Would you like a drink?"

He nodded. She brought him a whiskey and soda, her expression puzzled. "Well, what is it?" she asked. "You look worried."

Whaley said: "Lily, you sit down and listen to me."

She sat down in the chair by the table. She was quite relaxed, almost casual.

Whaley went on: "You listen to me, and ask yourself if I'm not talking sense. You remember that Cranleigh case three years ago?"

Lily said: "I remember it."

"Just about that time I went out to Australia. I got back about nine months later. I hadn't been back two days before the police were in touch with me. Detective-Sergeant Hone of Scotland Yard, came to see me with all the usual palaver. Had I any information that might be useful to them? What had I been doing on the night of the murder? Well, I told Hone I couldn't tell him. I asked him if *he* could remember what *he* had been doing nine months before. Tonight he was around again. He paid me a surprise visit."

"Yes . . . what for?" Her voice was soft, the tone level, almost soothing.

Whaley said: "Hone has got wise to the fact that the murder was committed on my birthday, see? So he wanted to know why I couldn't remember my whereabouts at the time of the murder —his idea being that a man should certainly remember what he was doing on his own birthday."

She smiled. "He's dead right, isn't he?" She leaned forward, her smile almost whimsical. "Did you tell him, Whaley?"

Whaley said: "Look, you know what these cops are like when they get their hooks into you. They've started this thing again with me and they're not going to get off my neck. Hone's coming to see me again tomor-

row and it looks to me as if I've got to do some fast talking."

She nodded. "Yes, Whaley? What are you going to say?"

He said: "I'm going to tell 'em something. They're bound to get it one way or another, you know. I'm going to tell them that Velvet Johnnie croaked old Cranleigh. It *must* have been Velvet."

Lily Malone sat upright in her chair. She said: "For God's sake, what is this? Johnnie was alibied on that night. I *alibied him*. He was with me."

Whaley grinned. "I wonder if they'd believe that. Look Lily. You were Velvet Johnnie's girl. You've always been carrying a torch for him. When they asked you about Johnnie you told them that he was with you that night, but you didn't tell them he was with you *all* night, did you?"

"Keep talking Whaley." Now her voice was a little tighter, a little grimmer.

He said: "I'll keep talking all right, and I'll tell you something you don't know. Johnnie and I always worked together. I should think we've done twenty jobs and they've never put a finger on either of us. They knew it was us all right but they've never been able to prove anything. We had a system of working, Velvet and I. He used to case a joint first of all—go round and have a look at the outside windows, locks, everything. There was no one in the world for casing a job like Johnnie.

"Then do you know what he used to do? He used to sit down at that old typewriter of his and work the whole thing out on paper, see? All nicely typed out—the time a job was to be done, how it was to be done, and just what he was going to do and just what I was going to do. He used to take care of getting in, safety for himself while we was in, and getting out. And I used to take care of the safe. You know I'm the best damned safe-blower in this country. There's never been a tin box I couldn't push open. And Johnnie was not good at that." He paused for a moment. Then he said: "That's why he had to do old Cranleigh in."

Lily Malone said: "Meaning what?"

"Meaning that because I wasn't with him—because I didn't like the job—he did it on his own, see? He got in the place. He fixed everything up all right and then that mug tried to get the safe open. Lord only knows how he tried to do it because it looked like a piece of dough. I saw a picture of it in the papers. He woke Cranleigh, and the old boy came down and there was only one thing for Johnnie to do. He did it. He used a crow-bar on Cranleigh."

Lily Malone said: "It's a nice story. So Johnnie sent you the

usual typewritten note about it first?"

Whaley nodded. "He handed me the sheet in the Four Feathers four nights before—a quarto sheet of typed paper with the whole job worked out on it. I took it home and I went through it, and I didn't like it. I rang up Johnnie. I told him I wasn't playing. Is that evidence, or is it?"

Lily Malone said: "You know, Whaley, what I'd call you? I think the right name for you is that you're a fascinating ugly son. I've always wondered what it was that I saw in you. I've always wondered why it was that after they'd got him and put him inside I walked out on Johnnie for you."

Whaley said: "Look, shall we leave the soft stuff out of it. Johnnie's coming out next week. How do you think he's going to feel when he finds you've ditched him and come over to me? Maybe he's not going to feel so good about that. You know, they may call him Velvet Johnnie, but he's got one hell of a temper. I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't try and do you in. You know he's always been crazy about you."

"I know. Maybe he'll try to kill me." She looked at him sideways. "I wouldn't like that."

Whaley said: "Maybe you won't have to worry. There's a good chance they'll be waiting for him when he comes out."

She said: "If you've got a typewritten note from him about the Cranleigh job, that alone could hang him. But you're not going to tell me he actually signed those things. Don't tell me he was such a fool."

He shook his head. "Of course not. He never signed them but it's easy to tell if they came from him. He always used that old portable typewriter with half the small 't' worn away, and with the 'o' key broken off, so that he had to use a question mark instead. Anybody who sees that note would know that it was written on Johnnie's typewriter. It's just as good as a signature, see?"

She said: "Yes, Whaley . . . *if* they had the typewriter."

He asked: "What about another little drink? And why don't you have one?"

"Maybe it's an idea." She mixed the drinks and carried his to him where he sat in the armchair. Then she went back to her seat by the table. She said: "Tell me some more about this note he sent you when he cased the job. What did he say in it?"

"Oh, just the usual routine with him—the situation of the house, the address, description of the locks, window bolts, front and rear entrances. The room where old Cranleigh slept—everything marked out. Descrip-

tion of the safe—the make of it, quality of steel, locks—the usual stuff."

She nodded. "And that note was written on his old typewriter?"

He said: "Yes."

"If you had that note," said Lily Malone, "and you gave it to Hone tomorrow night, they'd take Johnnie in for this with no argument, especially if I told them that I made a mistake and Johnnie wasn't with me that night."

Whaley said: "Right, baby." He smiled at her. "And Johnnie wasn't with you that night. Do you know how I know?"

"You tell me, Whaley."

Whaley said: "Because *I* was with you, see?"

There was a long silence. Then she said slowly: "I see . . ."

She was about to go on. He put up his hand. "You listen to me, Lily. You know I've never been inside. I've been what you might call successful in my profession. Velvet Johnnie used to spend his money like dirt. I never did. When I went over to Australia just after that murder I salted some dough away. I'm worth seven thousand pounds in Australia, Lily. I'm thinking of settling there.

"It's a nice country and I fancy myself as a farmer. I thought that it might be a good idea if you and I got married before next week — before Johnnie comes out, see? And when he does come out he won't be able to get annoyed with you, baby, because he'll be put right back in stir. They'll pinch him the moment he comes out of his cell. Then you and I go to Australia where the sun's always shining."

She moved a little. "So you're going to give Hone the note, Whaley, are you—the typewritten note?"

Whaley said: "I'd like to, but I haven't got it." He leaned back, and sat smiling at her. "I was damned short-sighted about that note," he went on. "When I rang Johnnie up to tell him I wasn't going to do the job with him—that I didn't like it—I tore the note into little pieces and threw them in the fire. See what I mean?"

"I see. What you mean is that if you had the typewriter that Johnnie wrote the note on—the typewriter with half the 't' missing and the 'o' missing, and the other defects, you could write the note again yourself. You could write it on an old sheet of paper—maybe one of the old sheets that you've got from the time when you and Johnnie were working together. *If you had the typewriter.* Is that right?"

"That's right, Lily."

She asked: "How much did you say you've got in Australia?"

He smiled. "I said I've salted away seven thousand out there.

But that's not all. I've got two and a half thousand here."

Lily Malone picked up her glass from the table. She drank a little of the whiskey. She held the glass and drank the drink fastidiously. Every movement she made was neat, graceful.

She said: "Listen, Whaley. You bring me two thousand pounds of that two and a half thousand tomorrow morning. I don't care how you get it, but you get it. If you do that you know what I'll do?"

"You tell me, sweetheart."

She said: "I'll go and get Johnnie's old typewriter. I know where it is. He pawned it a week before he went inside. I found the ticket in one of his old suits of clothes. I got it out, see? So you can have your talk with Detective-Sergeant Hone tomorrow night, and when this thing is all over you and I will go to Australia. I think I'd like it there."

Whaley said: "There's just one other problem. Quite possibly Hone will get around to you before Johnnie comes out next week. If he does he'll ask you some questions. Don't forget that you spent that night—the whole night—with me. You couldn't forget it because it was my birthday night. You'd got fed up with Johnnie because you'd had a row with him. You had an idea that Johnnie was going to do a job and you didn't like it."

Lily said: "I see, Whaley."

He got up. "I'll be going, kid. I'll be round at twelve o'clock tomorrow. I'll bring the dough with me. It'll take me a little time to get it together."

She said: "That's all right. You be here at twelve, and I'll have the typewriter."

Whaley crossed over to her. He put his arm round her waist. "You got something, kid . . ." He kissed her on the mouth.

When she drew herself away she said cynically: "Yes, Whaley. I've got something. I've got the tpyewriter!"

WHEN THE train came in Hone was standing by the side of the bookstall. He saw Velvet Johnnie get out of the third-class compartment at the back of the train and walk, with his small suitcase in his hand, towards the barrier. Hone thought that Johnnie's stretch in prison hadn't done him any harm. His walk was still quick but with the certain suavity and grace that had earned him the name of Velvet Johnnie. His head was up and his shoulders held straight. Hone thought he looked pretty good.

As Johnnie handed over his ticket at the barrier, the detective stepped out.

He said: "Hello, Johnnie!"

Velvet Johnnie halted abruptly. A smile broke over his face. He said: "Well, well . . . Mr.

Hone! How are you? How are they doing at that funny academy of yours?"

Hone said seriously: "A bit too well, I'm afraid. I want to talk to you."

"For the love of Pete," said Johnnie. "I've just come out and a copper wants to talk to me. Don't tell me I pulled a job while I was in stir, Mr. Hone."

Hone said: "No, it's worse than that."

Velvet Johnnie grinned. "Is it? Perhaps you'd better tell me what it is."

"It's murder—the Cranleigh job."

Johnnie said: "Now look—"

Hone held up his hand. "Let's not talk about it here, Johnnie. Let's go and have a cup of tea in the refreshment room."

They sat at a deserted table in the station restaurant. Hone ordered two cups of tea.

He said: "Johnnie, here's the story. I'll give it to you straight. When I talked to you about the Cranleigh murder you had an alibi. You were supposed to have spent that night with Lily Malone—the girl who was going to marry you when you came out."

"What do you mean—*was* going to marry me?"

Hone said: "That's how it is. She's gone back on the alibi. She says that you weren't with her that night. She said you'd had a row because you wanted to crack that Cranleigh crib and she didn't want you to. So she told you off, and walked out on you. She went over to see Whaley. She went to him because first of all she liked him and secondly because he refused to go out on that job with you."

Velvet Johnnie said: "So she's done the dirty on me. She's gone over to that first-class rat. Now she's trying to plant this on me."

"Drink your tea," said Hone. "And don't get sentimental about this, Johnnie. It won't get you anywhere. You tell me something. Is it true that you planned to have a go at that Cranleigh safe? Is it true that you cased the job and sat down at that little old typewriter of yours and typed a scheme for doing it. That used to be your *modus operandi,* didn't it?"

Johnnie nodded.

Hone went on: "Is it true that you met Whaley, handed him the typewritten scheme and he rang up and told you that he wasn't going to play because he didn't like it. Is that true?"

Johnnie said: "Yes, that's true enough. But I never went near the place that night. When Whaley wouldn't play I chucked it."

"So you went round and saw your girl friend Lily Malone instead?"

Johnnie nodded.

Hone said: "She says you didn't. She's prepared to go into the witness box and say just that

under oath, and I understand from Whaley that he's got the typewritten note that you gave him. Well, you know something about evidence, don't you, Johnnie? If you go into court you've absolutely no evidence as to where you were that night. All the other evidence in this case—the note you gave to Whaley, the row you had with Lily—everything points to you having done that job. There's enough there to hang you for it."

Velvet Johnnie shrugged his shoulders wearily. His face was drawn. "This is a swell homecoming. All the while I was in that train this afternoon I was thinking about seeing Lily—about making some plans for the future. And I walk into a murder rap and one that looks pretty hard to beat. Well, where do we go from here? What is it—the old story of the police car outside and Cannon Row, and would I like to make a statement?"

Hone said: "Listen, Johnnie. The police car's outside, but before I take you along to Cannon Row let's go and pay a visit, shall we? Let's go and see Lily Malone and Whaley. She's at his place now. I don't see any reason why you shouldn't hear what they've got to say before I charge you."

Velvet Johnnie finished his tea, put the cup in the saucer, and stood up. He said angrily: "Come on, let's go. Let's get it over with."

WHALEY followed Hone and Velvet Johnnie into the room. Lily Malone was standing in front of the fire, her hands clasped loosely behind her back.

She said: "Hello, Velvet. I suppose it'd be silly of me to say I'm glad to see you. I'm sorry it had to be like this."

Johnnie said softly: "Why should I want to talk to you? You know what I think you are, don't you? Let's leave it at that."

She smiled. "Just as you like, Velvet."

Hone said: "Sit down, Johnnie. And you sit down too Whaley. I'm dealing with this thing in a rather informal sort of way. But it seems to me it's my duty. I've got to repeat to you, Johnnie, what I've already told you. Lily Malone here says that the information she gave us originally about your having spent the night with her is not true.

"She's explained that she was giving you an alibi because she thought she was in love with you at the time. She wanted to save you. Whaley felt it was his duty—when I came here to question him the other day—to bring forward this evidence about the typewritten note he'd had from you after you'd cased Cranleigh's place."

He took the note out of his

pocket. It was folded in half, so that when Hone held it out to him Johnnie could only see the bottom half of the sheet.

Hone said: "You can save us a lot of trouble, Johnnie. Was the note you see here written on your typewriter?"

Johnnie nodded. "Yes."

Hone said: "So you recognize this note as the one you handed to Whaley?"

Velvet Johnnie sighed. "I suppose it is."

Hone's voice changed. "It isn't. *You didn't type this note, Johnnie.* It was typed within the last two or three days." He looked at Whaley. "I suppose you threw away the original note that Johnnie gave you, and I suppose you made a deal with Lily Malone. You must have. She knew where Johnnie's typewriter was. She loaned it to you and you typed this note."

Whaley began to speak.

Hone said: "Shut up. Don't you know, you damned fool, that you typed your own death warrant when you typed this note. You sat down at that machine and you tried to remember exactly what was in Velvet Johnnie's original note which you'd destroyed. You remembered most of it, but one thing you couldn't remember. You couldn't remember the address of old Cranleigh's house. So you did what you thought was the wisest thing. You went round there and checked on it."

Hone unfolded the note. "Here it is—Fourteen Welwyn Street."

Whaley said: "So what?"

Hone said: "You poor self-destroying fool! The name of that street was changed two weeks after Velvet Johnnie went into prison. At the time the murder was committed it was Fourteen Maberley Street. Didn't you know they changed the names of lots of these streets after the war bombing?"

There was a silence, broken only by the noise of the door opening. The sergeant from the police car outside was standing in the doorway.

Hone began his little speech. "William Ernest Whaley, I am known to you as a police officer and I am arresting you on a charge of murder. Lily Anna Malone, I am arresting you on a charge of being an accessory after the fact . . ."

the banana herder

by...Lawrence G. Blochman

A killer at large in a Central American jungle may be difficult to outwit. But Egan knew that a wise host must be—*a gun expert!*

PROFESSOR Nicholas Zorick arrived in Central America with letters from the third vice-president of the fruit company. The letters indicated that he was a plant pathologist from Harton University intent on investigating the peculiarities of the genus Musa when cultivated for profit, as well as the habits and functions of other flora on and about banana plantations.

The professor's arrival coincided with the rise of a river capable of flooding some fifty square miles of bananas—a phenomenon more immediately vital to the personnel of the division than the scientific improvement of the species. However, since the professor came accredited, he was hurried from the port to the division manager at Platanera, who passed him on to the superintendent of agriculture, who quickly sent him out to Tom Egan.

Egan was overseer at Blazco Farm at the end of the farthest branch of the company's private railway system. The farm was

Mr. Blochman can take a lab consultation in a modern hospital and make it hum with dire toxicological implications involving several doctors, a nurse, a scoundrelly nephew and an entire city police department. Or he can decide instead to come to grips with crime in a steamy jungle setting. Be that as it may, you can be sure that for crime fiction entertainment in suspense-thriller vein you'd have to search long and far for a more satisfying yarn than this.

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near the Honduranian border and the ultimate point from which fruit could be cut and rushed to the refrigerated hold of a steamer before starting to ripen. The superintendent of agriculture said afterward that he had sent the professor to Blazco at his own request to see a new plantation nearest virgin jungle, a request easily explained by the events that followed. He had obviously not picked Blazco because he thought that Tom Egan was the ideal host for a plant pathologist on the loose. And Egan was by no means overjoyed at the prospect of entertaining the professor.

Not that Egan was surprised at the task assigned him. He had been in the tropics long enough to know that a banana farmer is considerably more than a man who merely grows, harvests and ships bananas. In order that a bunch of golden fruit may hang in the corner grocery at Jinksville, Iowa, the overseer must be a very versatile man.

Egan mumbled something about having no time to play nursemaid to bald-headed professors when the river was getting ready to act up. But he appeared rather philosophical when John Clark, the broad, squat district superintendent, brought Zorick around at lunch time.

Egan shook hands with the plant pathologist on the veranda. He loomed a full two heads above Zorick's bald spot as he said, "Howdy, Prof."

Egan had had slight experience with professors before. He had attended a small Southern college for one football season, but he had left in a huff when some of his professors had intimated that higher education should be tempered with an interest in such academic subjects as English composition and calculus.

Consequently, there was nothing collegiate about Tom Egan; rather there was an indescribable cowboy look about him as he stood before Zorick in his five-gallon hat, high boots and the green flannel shirt which he swore kept the heat out, rather than in. His nose was narrow and slightly beaked. He greeted the professor with a perceptible Texas drawl. His lips, thin but good-humored, smiled a little more on one side than the other as if it were too much of an effort to smile on both sides of the face at once.

In fact, all of Egan's movements gave the impression that they were designed to require effort. His associates claimed that the only reason Egan had the most equable temper in the division was because he was too lazy to get his back up.

After lunch Egan sent the professor out to ride the farm with Bill Jessop, his earnest, red-headed young timekeeper. Jessop

had a face and a studious manner that ought to go well with professors. Besides, Egan himself wanted to ride along the river to have another look at the levees, as the high water had already begun to back up into the drainage ditches.

Egan was taking a shower before dinner when Jessop came in to tell him about the professor.

"I showed him where the bananas grow only fifteen feet tall and where they grow thirty," said Jessop. "I rode him out to the edge of the jungle. I don't believe he was the least interested. He asked what kind of shooting we did around here. I told him we occasionally took a potshot with side arms, but that Gladstone, the Jamaican foreman, did the only serious hunting; that you furnished the ammunition and Gladstone was supposed to bring us game. So nothing would do but I had to take him around to the labor camp to see Gladstone."

At dinner the plant pathologist again seemed more interested in things other than roots and leaves. Toying with his small mustache, he asked repeated questions about some obscure Maya ruins in the jungle on the frontier-ruins too unimportant to interest archeologists and too inaccessible to interest tourists.

He wanted to know where one might strike the trail, how far it was, how the going was and whether it was true that a band of outlaws had their headquarters there. Egan, who had been most of the way to the ruins with a surveying party once, answered his questions.

After dinner Professor Zorick transferred his attention to Egan's Scotch whisky, displaying an interest that was more than academic. The three men went to bed at ten-thirty, which is late on a banana farm.

At midnight a phone call from Clark, the district superintendent, routed Egan reluctantly from his bed. Upstream observers had reported another two-foot rise of the river at Santa Paula, Clark informed him. The new high water would reach the banana farms in six to eight hours with higher water later, since it was still raining heavily in the highlands. The levees had to be built up accordingly.

Egan got into action. He was not precisely a human dynamo. His movements were as deliberate and his drawl as unexcited as ever. Yet his blue eyes, pink-rimmed from his sudden awakening, shone with a steely gleam under his long, brown, almost feminine lashes.

Egan was indisputably lazy; but once his initial inertia was overcome he was capable of much work. He piled out Jessop, woke the mule boy, roused the Jamaican foreman by phone. Then he climbed on a mule and

rode to the camp to see that the native contractors turned out a full supply of labor.

Egan knew that the division engineer would be busy downstream, where washouts on the company's main line would disrupt the whole system of fruit distribution. If the river came ashore at Blazco Farm, all it could do would be to blight fifty thousand banana plants and wash out the light, thirty-pound rails of the branch railway and feeder lines for the mule trams. Egan would have to depend on himself to protect his own farm. It would be expected of him. The superintendent of agriculture had a theory that one overseer should be the equal of any two rivers.

At three in the morning a work train came through with the shovels, bags, and thirty men.

At dawn the river was within eighteen inches of the top of the levee and had started to undercut the bank. Egan decided to sacrifice the strip of plantation along the bank in the hope of saving the rest of his farm. The idea was originally Jessop's. Jessop was always full of theories, but Egan appropriated only the best ones. He would build a new levee fifty yards, perhaps a hundred yards, from the river, ready to hold back the water when the flood had either topped or cut away the present dike.

By eight in the morning two hundred men from the Blazco labor camp were filling sand bags. Fruit cutters, backers, ditch men, checkers—every available hand was on the job.

At noon Egan rode back to his bungalow to rest for an hour and to report to Platanera that the river was still rising, but that he still had a farm. He was momentarily surprised to see Professor Zorick on his veranda. He had forgotten that he had an official guest.

"I guess I'm kind of neglecting you, Professor," drawled Egan, "but the river's kicked over the traces on us. Maybe this is just what you're looking for. In a few days you'll be able to watch how a couple of thousand banana plants turn brown and droop when they've had water standing on their toes for forty-eight hours."

"Don't bother about me," said Zorick. "I'll keep busy. Maybe I'll borrow Gladstone's rifle and do a little hunting."

"Gladstone does not like to lend his rifle," said Egan. "He's jealous of it like it was a pretty girl. And it ain't even a good gun. He's funny that way."

"Oh, well, there's no hurry," said Zorick. "I'll stay around here until the daily press bulletin comes up."

"We don't get copies up here," said Egan.

"I took the liberty of making

arrangements at the Tropical Radio station in Puerto Justo," Zorick explained. "Fussy of me, I suppose, but I must keep abreast of the news. They're sending the press sheets up to me. The district superintendent's motor is supposed to bring them."

Zorick resumed his study of a map of the region.

Egan got two hours' sleep before the phone rang to inform him that the division engineer had changed his strategy and was moving his base of operation to Blazco Farm.

By five o'clock that afternoon the river had cut away part of the original levee and was making quick work of the rest. Egan's second line of defense was holding.

Clark was on the scene to explain the new plan of action. "You're to transfer operations to the other bank," he said. "The engineers want to dig a new channel for the river to see if we can't divert some of the flood waters to the south fork."

"I got less than two hundred men," said Egan, "and they've been working eighteen hours with almost no rest. How do you expect—"

"Cheer up, banana herder," said Clark, slapping Egan on the back. "It's all in a good cause. On account of your good work the teen-agers in Far Rockaway won't have to do without banana splits this Summer."

Egan crossed the river—a broad, swift, brown torrent, swirling and boiling furiously as it carried along uprooted trees, great manaca palms, broken banana stalks, overturned cayugas, and the swollen carcass of a mule. He landed on the black silt playa of the opposite bank, once a favorite basking place of alligators, but now swept by coffee-colored foam. There was not ān alligator to be seen.

By dark, there were five hundred men working on the other side of the river. Egan, black with mud, was in the thick of them. He was surprised to find that Gladstone, his foreman, was not around. By inquiry he found that Gladstone had gone home just before work had been shifted from the other bank and had apparently not returned.

Egan supposed he would be along later. Five hundred more men were being brought from all parts of the division, carried as close to the river as the work trains dared to venture on the waterlogged roadbeds. Launches, towing lighters full of men and shovels, fought their way across the mad current, dodging ceiba trees and other floating battering rams that came charging down the stream.

Egan was vaguely worried about Gladstone. The foreman was not a man to shirk his job.

Something might have happened to him. Things do happen to Jamaican foremen. They antagonize a labor contractor, or get into a row over the butchering concession. Egan had seen a Jamaican chopped in a machete fight two years previously.

He sent a man back across the river to look for Gladstone. The man came back in an hour with no news. Egan's fears were pushed to one side by the press of work.

The night was filled with the hoot of work trains sliding cautiously through the bananas toward the river. Improvised flares marked the mile and a half of channel that was to be dug before morning. The wavering light from the torches glistened ruddily on naked, sweating torsos bending to shovels.

Egan himself took a shovel from the hands of an exhausted mozo. A blast of dynamite provoked a panic of chattering monkeys and shrieking birds in the adjoining jungle.

An hour before dawn the river rushed frothing, gurgling and hissing into its new man-made bed. An hour after dawn both the new bed and the old bed were nearly stagnant lagoons, idly reflecting the pale gold of the early sun, still swathed in morning mists. New broad black playas stretched up from the strangely shrunken watercourse, affording bigger and better basking grounds for the long-jawed alligators, already crawling out to lie stretched at their full greenish length to await the heat of the day.

With the sudden contrariness of a capricious woman, the swollen tropical river had spurned its new channel and abandoned its old, to break through elsewhere and settle in an entirely new course—a shallow reach several miles away overland. In any event, the company's main line was saved and a million stems of fruit were preserved from water blight. Work trains chugged through the rescued plantations to take the peons back to their respective camps, and Tom Egan went home to stumble, fully dressed, on to his bed.

He did not know until eight o'clock in the morning that Professor Nicholas Zorick was missing.

It took the pock-marked, bow-legged houseboy five minutes to wake Egan. The boy was persistent, because Egan was always difficult to arouse. He paid no attention to the overseer's drowsy profanity. Senor Clark was on the phone. It was important.

"Where is Professor Zorick?" the district superintendent wanted to know when Egan had dragged himself to the instrument.

"In bed, probably," drawled Egan, "like all sensible people."

"Ask him what time he wants me to send the motor for him. He's expected at Platanera today."

Egan was away from the phone for a minute. When he returned he said, "I can't seem to locate the professor."

"Find him, then," said Clark. "He's your guest. Find him and call me back."

All right, I'll find your plant astrologist for you," said Egan and hung up.

But he did not find him. No one around the house had seen him. The cook said she thought she had heard him moving about before daylight. The stock man had not seen him, but he reported that there was a mule missing.

Egan swore as he got his big frame into motion to trace his guest. A damned nursemaid, that's what he was. The professor was more trouble than the river.

He rode down the tracks toward the labor camp and opened doors in the long yellow building that housed the tired mozos. He found no trace of Zorick. He rode to the next farm. All he got there were sleepy curses. He continued on to the next labor camp. The district was asleep today, drowsing in the hot sun after its long fight against the river, catching its breath before resuming the routine of cutting fruit.

The only person Egan saw stirring was an old crone behind the yellow labor lines. She was cooking tortillas in a beehive-shaped oven under a manaca canopy. Egan questioned her. The crone said she had seen a man, who might have been the professor, riding a mule toward the far sections of Blazco Farm, over toward the hills. He had been alone.

Egan phoned his report to the district superintendent. "The poor damn fool's probably gone off to those Maya ruins he was asking me about," he said.

"Alone?"

"So far as I know he's alone."

Clark then spoke gravely: "You shouldn't have let him do that. He's not familiar with the tropics. He'll probably lose himself in the jungle."

"That's too bad, Mr. Clark, but I didn't tell him to go. And it's not my fault he's a molly-coddle and can't take care of himself."

"He's the company's guest, and you're responsible for him. I'd hate to have to report that you lost him. Better go after him."

"Aw now, Mr. Clark, I sure rate a little sleep, don't I? I been busy with the river . . ."

"Better go right out after him, banana herder."

"All right, Mr. Clark."

Egan hung up. It was too much effort to argue. Grumbling

to himself, he filled a big canteen with water, slipped a full flask into his hip pocket and made a package of greasy fritos which the cook had been frying for herself. He exchanged his mule for a swifter but less comfortable one. Then he slipped the toes of his boots, still incrusted with river mud, into the stirrups, and started out after Professor Zorick.

Egan had been gone nearly two hours when the district superintendent discovered what was probably in store for the overseer and had a gastric chill at the thought that he was in a measure responsible. Clark had called Platanera to say that Professor Zorick's schedule had been retarded a day. The call reminded the division manager that in the excitement of the battle against the river he had overlooked the fact that he had not received the usual copy and confirmation of the professor's letters of introduction. He immediately called Tropical Radio at Puerto Justo and put through a routine query to the home office.

In less than an hour the answer came back from the States: LETTERS PALPABLE FORGERIES PROFESSOR NICHOLAS ZORICK UNKNOWN THIS OFFICE HARTON UNIVERSITY HAS NO SUCH PERSON ON FACULTY.

When John Clark heard the reply, he had his motor rolled on to the tracks and hurried to Blazco Farm. Here he found Jessop, the earnest young timekeeper, already full of theories.

"Read this," said Jessop, handing Clark a crumbled sheet of the previous day's radio bulletin, which he had found wadded under a table on the veranda. He pointed to the following item:

> New York—*Jeremy Freen, known as the Ph.D. killer, who shot his way out of Midwest Penitentiary two weeks ago, killing three guards, is believed to be in Central America. Police yesterday picked up his week-old trail in New York and found evidence indicating that he had sailed for some Caribbean port. Passenger lists are being scrutinized in an effort to learn his assumed identity.*

"I suppose you think the professor is Freen?" asked Clark.

"Not much doubt about it," Jessop replied. "When he decided to jump the country he forged those letters of introduction, so that the fruit company would obligingly set about building up a new identity for him. Or he may have had some definite objective in coming to this part of the tropics—friends, maybe. When he saw by the radio bulletin that his presence in Central America was suspected, he pulled up stakes and left

before we got wise to his real name."

"This another one of your theories?"

"It's not all theoretical," said Jessop. "When I saw that item in the press bulletin, I dug into the bundle of New York papers that came in with the last mail. Look."

The red-headed timekeeper produced a newspaper and folded the bulky pages to an account of the escape of Jeremy Freen. There was a one-column cut of the "Ph.D. Killer" in convict garb. Jessop had penciled in a small mustache — an addition which, despite the felony number hung about the neck of the man in the prison photograph, gave him a close resemblance to Professor Nicholas Zorick.

Clark snatched the paper, and anxiously read the story of the man's escape and recapitulation of his career. Jeremy Freen, according to the newspaper, had been a brilliant chemist with a queer kink in his brain which had shunted him into a life of ruthless, solitary crime. His unusual intelligence enabled him to get through a dozen robberies with three incidental murders before he was arrested the first time. Pleading homicidal mania, he was committed to an asylum for the criminal insane, escaped inside of three weeks, and was arrested the second time only after he had accomplished five more robberies and two murders. He was awaiting the result of an appeal on a death sentence when he made his last escape.

"Police declare Freen to be one of the most dangerous criminals at large," the account concluded. *"His mild, disarming appearance, coupled with his education, the amoral quirk in his uncanny intelligence and his absolute disregard for human life, makes him a peril to any one who crosses his path, the police commissioner told reporters."*

"My God!" exclaimed Clark. "I hope Egan doesn't find him."

"He will," said Jessop. "Egan will overtake him before dark certainly, and probably sometime early this afternoon."

"My God!" Clark repeated. "If he's as desperate as the paper says, he'll think Egan wants to bring him back because he's found out he's Jeremy Freen. Of course he's armed."

"Sure," said Jessop. "He stocked up from the bungalow while we were all at the river last night. He helped himself to a pile of canned stuff from the pantry and took our guns. He took my thirty-two and he took Egan's automatic. Ammunition, too. I checked on that."

"You mean that Egan hasn't even got his own gun?"

Jessop shook his head. "All Egan has is the machete hanging from his pommel."

Clark arose suddenly and slapped his ample thigh resoundingly with the folded newspaper. "I'll have to go after him," he exclaimed.

"I thought you might let me—"

"I'll go," Clark repeated. "I sent Egan out on this. I— There goes your phone. Get on it."

When Jessop returned to the veranda his face was grim.

"They found Gladstone," he said. "He's been murdered."

"Your foreman? What happened? A drunken row?"

"Gladstone wasn't killed in a machete fight. He was shot."

"Shot? Your mozos pack guns nowadays?"

"No mozo killed Gladstone. According to my theory, Jeremy Freen wanted a rifle before he hit out for the monte. He tried to borrow Gladstone's. When Gladstone objected he killed him."

Clark jammed on his hat. "Phone the comandante, will you?" he said, starting off the veranda. "Tell him I'll have a mule for him if he wants to start out with me to bring back a murderer."

The screen door slammed behind him. He paused at the hibiscus hedge to fling back to the disappointed timekeeper, "Don't forget you've got fruit to cut. I want six hundred stems of English fruit from Blazco Farm tomorrow. The cars will be spotted this afternoon. If Egan's not back, start stowing in the morning."

TOM EGAN'S eyelids drooped as he rode through the steamy morning. He was too sleepy even to be annoyed at the thought that he would at this moment be enjoying well-earned slumber had not a bald-headed professor set out to get lost in the jungle.

He opened his eyes and prodded his mule into a gallop. He was following the well-grassed tramline that ran to the far edge of the farm, knowing that this would be his best opportunity to cut down the professor's lead. The jogging gait of the animal, moving through the green cloister of great banana leaves curving gracefully overhead, awoke him somewhat.

Beyond the last section of bananas he turned the mule into what had once been a trail cut by fruit company engineers making surveys for future banana cultivation. The land had never been cleared and the tropics had quickly reclaimed their own. The work of the engineers enabled a man to get through the jungle here without getting off his mule too frequently. But the undergrowth, mule-high in some spots, was too rank to allow anything but a plodding advance.

Egan knew he was on the right track, for there were defi-

nite signs of the professor's passing—broken twigs, flattened grass, occasional hoof prints in the muddy banks of small streams. His own mule's caution kept Egan awake. He had to swear gently at the animal when it halted at some strange noise in the undergrowth, goad it when it balked on the margin of some uncertain muddy stretch, swear again when he had to dismount and help the mule flounder out of belly-deep mire.

The oppressive gloom of the jungle, fragrant with the warm smell of damp leaves and rotting vegetation, was not conducive to continued alertness, however. After awhile he no longer blinked at the white-hot shafts of sunlight that burned through the twilight of tangled branches and creepers. He was blind to the flash of a brilliant wing, deaf to the scream of birds and the chatter of monkeys.

He slipped one foot out of its stirrup, eased himself to a seat on one haunch, and let his chin touch his chest. Once he came to life to beat off a cloud of hungry gnats. Once he roused to find his mule had stopped to browse on some plantanilla leaves. He stayed awake this time to push out of the jungle into a prairie of tall, sharp-bladed grass.

He had been this far before. He knew there was a swamp directly ahead. When he had gone another hundred yards he dismounted and examined the hoof prints his animal had been following. They turned to the east. That was the easiest trail, all right. It was the trail he had indicated to the professor when Zorick had asked about the way to the Mayan ruins. But it was longer.

By turning to the west, Egan would avoid the long circumference of the swamp. He would have to go back into the jungle, but the engineers had blazed the way. They had even left a manaca shack or two they had built when making the survey. He would gain an hour on the professor by taking the western trail, and he was anxious to end his mission as soon as possible.

It had begun to rain.

He cut west, found the first manaca shack and made a brief halt to rest his mule. The dirt floor of the shack was thick with weeds and the thatched roof teemed with some low form of animal life. Egan waded through the weeds, used his hat to brush a family of scorpions off a wooden table, and stretched out for a moment. He had a drink, ate some cold fritos, and in twenty minutes he was moving again.

The trail began to climb. The rain had increased from a hot drizzle to a steamy downpour. The greasy fritos that Egan had eaten lay in his stomach like bricks—clinker bricks, judging

from the multiplicity of sharp corners he seemed to feel. He tipped up his flask for a swallow of spiritus frumenti to aid digestion. The only noticeable effect was increasing drowsiness.

Within an hour he had come upon the westernmost reach of the swamp—a narrow neck that lost itself in the underbrush of a small ravine. Hundreds of tropical frogs were mingling bass and soprano in a strange chorus of praise to the rain.

Across the tangle of reeds and water plants, Egan could see the ruins of another manaca shelter built by the engineers, perhaps three hundred yards away. He squinted. A beat of exultation thumped in his chest, nearly awakening him completely. From behind one corner of the manaca shack the rump of a mule protruded. He would not have to go any farther. The professor must be here.

Egan would even spare himself that last few hundred yards ride. He could yell across at the professor to join him on his side. He cupped his hands, filled his lungs and let loose a blast of sound that echoed from the opposite slope.

"Hi, there, Professor Zorick!" he shouted. "Will you come over here or shall I come and get you?"

The rain was rattling on the leaves—not with the hollow, deafening roar it made on the bananas, but with a dull, drumming sound. Egan strained his ears to catch an answering hail. There was no response. He raised himself in his saddle, ready to repeat the shout, when he saw a tiny puff of gray smoke spewed out from the shack. At the same time he heard a sibilant zip clipping leaves and branches to his left. A second later came the crashing report of a rifle.

"The damn fool don't recognize me," said Egan to himself. "He probably thinks I'm one of those outlaws from the ruins he heard about. I guess I ought to ride closer so he can see who I am."

He spurred his mule forward another fifty yards, stood up in his stirrups, waved his hat about his head and yelled again.

Another shot struck the ground in front of him, spattering up mud as it ricocheted, whining, into the jungle.

The back of Egan's neck slowly turned red. What was the matter with that bald-headed duffer, to keep on shooting? Of course, he might be nearsighted. Or he might be scared to death about something. A musty old mollycoddle oughtn't to be allowed to play with guns. He was sure to hurt somebody.

"Quit that," bawled Egan, "or I'll come over and spank you!"

Another jet of mud spurted up in front of Egan. That was Gladstone's rifle; Egan recog-

nized the way it was shooting. The gun carried low and to the right unless you made allowance for the sights being a little out of line.

Egan's mule reared, wheeled about, started back down the trail in panic. Egan reined in and nearly pulled the animal's head off before he could turn around again. He was half tempted to let the mule have its head and go back to the farm. He'd be lucky to get back by dark anyhow. The professor would probably die of fright if left alone to spend the night in the jungle; he was already panicky for some reason or other. No, as long as he had come this far, Egan would take care of the professor, even if he had gone crazy. The district superintendent had said that Egan was responsible for his guest's getting lost; he would bring his guest back with him.

Egan dismounted and tied his mule to a tree. It was bad business, tying up a mule in the monte on account of the ants and other stinging insects that might crawl down the rope halter and drive the poor animal mad. But Egan did not expect to be gone long. Stooping to keep out of sight behind the tall growth, he ran along the trail. When he had reached a point twenty-five yards from the manaca shack, he took off his hat and raised himself slowly to make a cautious survey.

He could see the professor standing in the gloom of the shelter, rifle in hand. It would have been an easy shot for Egan —if he had had a gun. But even if he had had one, he couldn't shoot a man who was officially his guest, even if the guest had apparently gone crazy. And there was certainly something insane about the formerly mild Professor Nicholas Zorick. Even from a distance Egan could discern a glowering, distinctly unacademic expression on the man's face.

Suddenly an idea overtook Egan. The cogs of his brain ground slowly to a decision. He broke off a crooked branch, hooked his hat on it, and pushed it above the thicket some six feet in front of him.

Then he shouted, "Drop that gun, Professor!"

A shot answered him.

Egan immediately abandoned cover and sprinted toward the shack. Gladstone's rifle was a single shot. It would take an expert a second or two to reload, and the professor probably couldn't reload at the shoulder, which would give Egan an extra few seconds.

Egan's mud-clotted boots pounded their swift way toward the manaca shack. Egan was whooping like a banana cutter on the night after pay day.

The professor did not fumble long with the rifle as he saw Egan bearing down on him. The

bald man dropped the rifle and whipped out a long blue automatic—Egan's own automatic.

At the sight of his own gun Egan pulled up short, a few paces from the professor. He raised his hands shoulder high. With a vicious grin the professor closed up the distance, and shoved the muzzle of the gun into the pit of Egan's stomach. Instantly Egan's right hand flashed downward, pounced savagely on the professor's wrist, yanked the gun even farther into his stomach. The professor pulled the trigger . . .

JOHN CLARK had been riding anxiously through the jungle, riding as furiously as a mule can be ridden. Behind him rode a timekeeper who had won sharpshooter medals during several enlistments in the Marine Corps. The commandant and three native soldiers brought up the rear.

Clark had picked up the ex-Marine because he wanted someone who could shoot better than just well. He was certain there would be shooting. He had no hope of capturing alive a criminal as desperate as Jeremy Freen was supposed to be. He had even less hope that he would overtake Tom Egan before Egan overtook Freen.

When Clark reached the edge of the swamp and found mule tracks leading off down each of the two trails, he dismounted and examined the hoof prints, trying to decide which ones to follow. Before he could make up his mind, he was startled to see two mules come plodding through the thicket toward him. On the lead mule rode a man hog-tied, slung across the saddle like a sack of beans. On the second mule rode Tom Egan, a rifle on his back, a holster on each hip.

"Say, I hope you didn't get Platanera all excited about me losing my guest," drawled Egan, as he drew closer. "Because he ain't lost any more."

Egan wore a decidedly sheepish expression as he saw Clark and his companions staring, speechless, at the roped figure on the first mule.

"Say, I'm sorry I had to knock the professor out," he said. "I know it ain't exactly the way a fellow ought to treat his guest, but the prof kind of went crazy on us. Maybe he ain't used to the heat or something. He was shooting at me—"

"How the hell did you do it?" blurted Clark at last.

"Well, I kind of lost my temper," drawled Egan apologetically. "He poled my automatic into my stomach—my own automatic. I knew the damned thing wouldn't shoot when the barrel's pushed back like that. So I just grabbed his wrist and held the gun there so that the barrel would jam back against the recoil spring. No lock-breech automatic

will shoot like that. Then I lost my temper and clipped him on the chin. It's a good thing a plant astrologist don't know anything about guns, or I surely couldn't have taken a risk as great as that."

"He's no plant pathologist," said Clark when he recovered his breath. "He's an escaped murderer with nine killings on his record. The commandant here will take care of him for the ninth. He killed Gladstone for his rifle last night."

Egan swallowed but said nothing. Cold sweat sprang out in even lines across his forehead. He reached back for his flask and tipped it up for several long gurgles before he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

"If I'd known," he said, "I might have hit him harder. The idea of missing my sleep for a guy like that!"

A seaside hotel murder enables the fabulous Austin Bond to add a thirteenth crime of violence to his dozen famous mysteries. A remarkable short story by one of England's greatest writers.

THE SECRET MURDERER

By ARNOLD BENNETT

Brophy and Cowell—with more than one brain between them—do some police work a little on the brilliant side. And the curtains part on a victim dialing K for Killer without really knowing it.

DEAD DAMES DON'T DIAL

A brand new suspense thriller

By THEODORE STURGEON

in the next SAINT

the three-ball combination

by . . . Helen Nielson

What husband wouldn't be irked and aggrieved to find himself a spectator at his own funeral—in a chill bid for double indemnity?

LUCK IS A fickle thing. It can ride on your shoulder like a big brass epaulet, and then turn green and crumble away just when you need it the most. And then, when it doesn't seem to matter any more, luck can return like a reverse prodigal saying, *"Look who's back again! All is forgiven."*

It was like that with Harry Clifford. He might easily have died out on the desert. It happens all the time. You pick up a newspaper and read about some darned fool who's had motor trouble, or maybe a flat tire, somewhere out in that big oven. He becomes reckless and commits the supreme folly of wandering away from his car. It's an almost certain way of enabling the sucker's widow to collect his life insurance; but Harry Clifford was lucky. Now that it was too late, he was lucky.

He thought it over returning home. He wasn't exactly traveling first class, for he was squatting on the top of a truckload of lettuce—the eating kind, that

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Helen Nielson is rapidly becoming one of the most important new writers in American mystery fiction. THE SATURDAY REVIEW *called her first book "a top performance" and were quite as enthusiastic about her second and third volumes, going so far as to affirm: "Nielson is the first major addition to the crime field in the past decade." We think so, too, and point with pride to the fresh, exciting brash with death in this brand new Nielson suspense yarn.*

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is. Harry Clifford was fresh out of the spending kind. He thought about that, too, and how different everything could have been if luck hadn't deserted him. When had it been? Two—three nights ago? He raised one hand and stroked the growth of sandy beard on his sunburned face.

It was hard to remember anything so foolish as time out in that wide expanse of heat, hunger, and the pain from the lump on his head. Not that the lump bothered him any more. It was his eyes. That calamity alone had cost him the tournament—the bright lights glaring down from above, the tension as he chalked up the cue and took his stance, and then the terrible burning in his eyes.

It had been such an easy shot. The three-ball combination had been on—a natural. The fingers of Harry's left hand formed a bridge when he thought about it, and his right hand cupped around an invisible cue. There was nothing wrong with his hands. True, they were a little shaky after three days on nothing but a can of beans and a few half-withered oranges. But they'd been steady enough on the table.

What good was a professional billiards player without eyes? Three times world's champion—well, that had been quite a few years ago. Quite a few years, but still recent enough to enable him to make a living of sorts. But even those second-best breaks were all over now. He'd be lucky to get a lousy smoker exhibition after blowing this last one. And so now luck returned with a big fat gift—life.

The sun glaring down on the oil-streaked highway brought back the burning. Harry closed his eyes and tried to remember clearly just what had happened that night. He *hadn't* won the tournament—that was for sure. He'd missed the easy shot and blown his career, and then he'd crawled, like a whipped dog, into the old sedan and started barreling down the highway for home. But it was an all night drive and his eyes still bothered him.

Every oncoming diesel had headlamps that bored like fire into his brain. With a bad pass coming up ahead, it seemed the smart thing to pull over on the shoulder and sleep off a headache. But just as he swung the wheel about an attacker he never saw jerked open the car door and let him have it with something that felt like an anvil. And this boy was taking no chances. He'd driven him off down a dirt road leading into the desert and dumped him there—for dead probably.

The rest of the nightmare was hazy. Sometime the next morning he'd come to his senses and started walking toward what he thought was the highway. Instead, he'd stumbled across an

abandoned cabin where he found beans and life-saving oranges, and a bed to rest on until his strength and sense of direction returned.

This morning, before the sun was too high, he'd made his way back to the highway and crawled up on the truckload of lettuce he'd found parked outside a highway cafe. Now he was going home to Glendale with no prize money, no car, and—because the car thief had rolled him as well—not even the price of a telephone call to Corrine, who must be half crazy with fear by this time. It was a fine way for an ex-champion to return!

The truck made good time. They took the pass Harry had feared with no trouble and roared down into a valley smelling of oranges, eucalyptus, and smog. A little further on the highway became a boulevard with periodic stoplights, and then, at a familiar intersection, he crawled down off the lettuce and started walking.

His legs were rubbery but a search of his pockets brought up only twelve cents in change—hardly enough for a cab. And what were six blocks more after all he'd been through? He picked up strength just thinking about how near he was to a hot tub, a shave, and a plate of bacon and eggs.

He glanced at the clock in the window of the First National Bank. The unseen slugger had also relieved him of his wrist watch, the one engraved HARRY CLIFFORD, *World's Champion Pocket Billiards, 1945.*

It was a quarter past ten—much too late to have breakfast with Corrine unless the poor kid was flat on her back with worry. She was one in a million, Corrine. Never a word of complaint when they had to sell the house and move into a cheap apartment. And how brave she had been last winter, taking the job Clark Jeffries got her in the office of his insurance company to help out with expenses.

Insurance . . . How much better off Corrine would be if that slugger had done a thorough job and left her a widow. Twenty-five thousand dollars better off, according to the policy he'd taken out from Clark a few months ago. Or would the double indemnity clause apply in a case of murder?

Harry wasn't an expert on such matters, nor was he a dead man, so he kept on walking until he reached his street, and then turned and walked about half a block until he could see the apartment house just ahead. Abruptly he stopped.

Something was happening in what was usually a quiet neighborhood. The street was lined with cars, and a group of people were gathered outside the apartment house entrance. At first he was merely curious—then he be-

came frightened. Corrine! Surely she hadn't—!

Oh, no. She'd be worried, sure. But she wouldn't do anything drastic. Maybe there had been an accident. But even in that event, what was he so jumpy about? There were five other families living in that big stucco box. And then Harry got close enough to see the little flags on the black sedans, and just then the somber faced people started coming out of the building.

Corrine came out on Clark Jefferies' arm. She was all in black and looked as if she'd been crying. Clark was wearing a dark suit, and all the spectators looked grim except one young man with a flash camera who stepped forward and took a picture just as Clark was helping Corrine into the lead sedan. When he eased back through the crowd, Harry grabbed his arm.

"What's going on here?" he demanded.

The young man with the camera looked bored. "What does it look like? A guy died—so they're burying him. Not that there's much to bury after the fire."

"Fire?" Harry echoed.

"The car. He cracked up coming down a grade in the mountains a few nights ago. There wasn't enough left of him to identify except an engraved watch and a couple of charred billiard cues. He was a pro, I guess. Won a championship once."

"Three times," Harry corrected.

The cameraman looked mildly surprised. "Did you know him?" he asked.

"I—I've heard of him," Harry said.

"Well, you've got me beat. I never heard of the guy until the accident, but who am I to tell the editor what's news?"

So saying, the young man with the camera sauntered off. The crowd was breaking up by this time, and the sedans had started moving slowly down the street. But Harry didn't move. He just stood there on the emptying sidewalk looking exactly like a man watching his own funeral procession.

He had twelve cents in his pocket. With ten of the twelve cents Harry bought a cup of coffee in a cafe across the street from the First National Bank and tried to think things out. His mind was still foggy from his experience in the desert. Probably that was why he hadn't reacted normally to the scene back at the apartment house. It would have been so easy to step forward through the crowd and put an end to Corrine's grief. Why hadn't he done so?

The answer had been on his mind just before he walked onto that touching tableau. *Get it straight, Harry Clifford, ex-champion nobody remembers. You're*

all washed up in the only profession you know. All finished at the ripe old age of forty-three. So get it straight now. Insurance, that was it. Alive, Harry Clifford was nothing. Dead, he was twenty-five thousand dollars. No, make it fifty-thousand because what had happened to that unlucky hijacker wasn't murder. It was an accident, plain and simple. That was a lot of money to walk into just by staying dead.

Harry drank his coffee slowly. There would be no hitch to the insurance money. Clark Jefferies was an old friend. He'd probably do his best to speed things up on Corrine's account. The problem was what to do with Harry Clifford until the money was paid. Instinct urged him to go home, to be waiting there for Corrine when she returned from the funeral and do a real job of wiping away her tears. But that would be too risky. Not only would there be the danger of recognition from the other tenants, but Corrine herself was risky.

She might not go for the idea. She might be afraid, or just plain honest. After all, Corrine was a lot younger than he was. She couldn't know how it felt to be a middle-aged washout with nothing but his wife's paychecks to look forward to.

On the other hand, once she actually had the fifty thousand how could she object? It would be all safe and legal. She could take a trip, perfectly natural under the circumstances, and go to Mexico or South America, and he'd be there too. They'd be there together for the rest of their lives living the way he'd always wanted Corrine to live.

But how could he keep Harry Clifford alive, incognito, on two cents? Harry started raking his pockets again just in case he'd missed some loose change the first time. But all he could find, besides sand, was a bill from the Acme Garage for thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents. That was the final irony. For six months Max Kelley at the Acme had been after him to get the old crate tuned up and the brakes relined.

"She just ain't safe, Mr. Clifford," Max Kelley had said. "One of these days you'll slam down on that brake pedal and—nothing!" It seemed to Harry that he might at least have had the car stolen and wrecked *before* it was repaired. And then he got the idea.

Being dead was stimulating. Alive, Harry Clifford was a mild-mannered man with an imagination to match; but a dead man had nothing to lose. Right across the street was the First National Bank where he and Corrine carried a joint checking account—what was left of it. Corrine would not think it strange if a cancelled check made out to the Acme garage—properly dated, of

course—came in at the end of the month. She'd taken the car to the garage herself on the morning of the day he left for the tournament—dropped it off on her way to work so he could get a long sleep before driving the desert after sundown. How could she know that he'd paid the bill with some of the cash withdrawn for the trip?

The first step of the plan which had begun to take shape in Harry's mind was easy. The next step, the cashing of the check, took more daring. Max Kelley banked across the street, too. It was a neighborhood bank and everybody knew everybody else. But when Harry studied his reflection in the mirror behind the cafe counter, his daring rose to the occasion.

Unshaven, dirty, and sunburned, he bore little resemblance to the neat, pale-faced man who occasionally drifted into the bank to cash his wife's paycheck. Besides, Harry Clifford was dead, wasn't he? No one in the bank would expect to see him on the day of his funeral. In any event, he had nothing to lose.

Harry made two trips to the bank. The first time he wore his coat. He stepped up to the first window just long enough to ask, "Could I have a blank checkbook, please?"

It took only a few seconds. The teller didn't even look at him as he shoved the book through the window. Then he went to one of the desks and wrote out a check to the Acme Garage for the sum of thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents and signed it Harry G. Clifford, the way he always signed his checks.

On the reverse side he made an imitation of Max Kelley's scrawl copied from the bottom of the bill where it had been marked paid. Then he went outside and walked down the street until he came to a service station. Around in the back of the station he found an old oil drum. He removed his coat and laid it behind the drum. Then he rolled up his sleeves and rubbed some of the oil from the side of the drum into his hands. When they looked stained enough to pass for a mechanic's hands, he dirtied up the check a little and returned to the bank.

This trip was the payoff. It had to be quick and convincing. He went to a different window and shoved the check, with the bill showing the Acme heading in his hand, under the teller's nose.

"Say, fella, Max Kelley over at the Acme Garage mislaid this check when he made his last deposit. He wants cash for it right away. We've got a customer waiting for change."

It sounded convincing to Harry. The teller didn't look up. He looked at the greasy hands and looked at the check. Everything

was in order. Max Kelley had an account here. Harry G. Clifford? He could look it up if he wanted to. It was all perfectly legal. What was wrong with a dead man drawing a check on his own account?

A few minutes later, Harry walked out of the bank with thirty-seven fifty in his pocket. He went back to the service station, got his coat from behind the oil drum, washed his hands in the washroom, and went out to find another cafe and that plate of bacon and eggs. He was beginning to feel good again. It was kind of like a billiard game. He'd just completed the bank shot, and luck was riding on his shoulder like a brass epaulet.

After the bacon and eggs, Harry took a walk to another part of town where a man could live a lot longer on thirty-seven dollars and found a room in a cheap hotel. He didn't mind being a bum for a few weeks when the payoff was fifty thousand.

By noon, when they were all finished saying prayers over the grave of Harry Clifford, he was sleeping off a nightmare and dreaming of paradise.

It was after dark when Harry came out of his dream. It was such a lovely dream, he didn't like to leave it. He was with Corrine at one of those swank hotels somewhere down on the Caribbean. It was night and they were dining on a balcony overlooking the sea.

Corrine was beautiful. She was wearing one of those low-cut gowns that leaves just enough to the imagination, and he had on a white dinner jacket with a pleated-front shirt and a cummerbund. It was a big improvement over that shiny tuxedo he'd been performing in for the past ten years. They were having champagne served by a waiter in a tailcoat, and just when he popped the cork somebody hit a strike in a bowling alley across the street and knocked the dream apart.

Without the dream, it was rough being alone in that cheap room. Harry got up and went to the window. He didn't know what time it was, but the street had a late look. Late and shabby. It reminded him of when he was a kid and got his start playing for whatever stakes he could get in the poolrooms. After a while he got too good and there were no more takers, and so he turned pro.

Then came the good years. A few really good ones, and the best of all the year he met Corrine . . . Even without the dream, Harry's mind kept coming back to Corrine. She was out there, across town, all alone with her grief. It wasn't fair. Did he dare go to her? Maybe she'd go along with the plan. Maybe if he talked to her—

Fifty thousand dollars was riding on one big "maybe." But before Harry could talk himself out of the idea he was walking the night streets toward a stucco box where five and a half families were sleeping off a busy day. It was a quiet street again. All of the windows were dark.

Harry hesitated on the sidewalk, his fingers itching at the key in his pocket. His mind was still troubled with the thought of that fifty thousand. If Corrine was asleep, it was probably just as well to leave her alone. He could at least walk back to the bedroom window and listen to hear if she was still crying. If she was, that was it. Risk or no risk, he'd have to go in.

But Corrine wasn't crying; she was talking. The window was dark, but she was talking.

"I'm glad it's all over," she was saying. "Oh, God, am I glad! I've bee so scared, Clark."

Clark! Harry waited for the answer. Maybe she was on the telehone—but she wasn't. Clark Jefferies' voice answered, easy and relaxed.

"I told you not to worry," he said. "What could go wrong? That fire was the master stroke."

"But the money—"

"Honey, be patient—"

There was a silence. A long silence that brought sweat to the palms of Harry's hands. And then Clark Jefferies' voice came again.

"It'll take a couple of weeks," he murmured. "I'll push it along. What's a couple more weeks in this dump when we've waited so long?"

Corrine didn't answer. The silence came back, and out on the sidewalk Harry Clifford stood alone looking every bit the dead man he was supposed to be.

It was like that with luck. One minute it was on your shoulder; the next it was gone. For a big piece of time everything was gone for Harry Clifford. The whole planet was gone and he was just an empty body walking about through a vast expanse of nowhere. Eventually he got back to his cheap hotel room.

He sat on the edge of the bed and tried to understand. Corrine—his wife alone—was all he could think of at first. Just Corrine. And then, through the pain of it all, he seemed to hear Clark's voice again: *"I told you not to worry. What could go wrong? The fire was a master stroke. What's a couple more weeks in this dump when we've waited so long?"*

A big wall of fury rose up in Harry and his fists smashed into the bedsprings. How long? How long had the two of them been playing him for a fool? No wonder Clark had been so nice about getting Corrine a job in his office! No wonder Corrine had been so sacrificially unselfish about taking it! He should have walked in on

them. He should have let himself in quietly with his key, and then walked in and got a good look at the expression on their faces before he tore them apart. But he hadn't. He'd simply stood outside on the sidewalk—just as he'd done earlier in the day when he'd become a spectator at his own funeral. And why? The answer was still the same. Fifty thousand dollars.

And then, because the pain and anger in his mind was ebbing a little, Harry remembered other things Clark and Corrine had been saying in the darkness. The insurance company didn't know it, but that was no accident they were going to pay off on. *It was murder.*

Murder. That was thought enough to keep him awake all night. How had they managed it? It had to be the car, of course. *"The fire was a master stroke,"* Clark had said. Had he managed to get at the car on the day when it had been at the garage and rig up something under the hood? That couldn't be the whole answer.

The man with the camera said the accident had occurred on a steep, downhill grade in the mountains. Clark couldn't have been so positive there would be nothing to worry about if he'd depended on anything as risky as mere reckless driving, even on the part of a man with poor eyesight.

But there *was* something else—

"She just ain't safe, Mr. Clifford. One of these days you'll slam down on the brake pedal and—nothing!"

The brakes! Harry combed through his pockets and came up with the bill from the garage again. He ran his finger down the list of repairs. The brake relining job was listed, but that didn't prove the work had been done. Corrine had taken the car to the garage herself—insisted on it. Her excuse had been that he needed his sleep. A good long sleep!

How did he know what she'd told Max Kelley? The Acme was a small garage, a hole in the wall compared to the big agencies. It might not take too much of that fifty thousand to talk Max into making a slight adjustment that would feel tight for a hundred miles or so.

The longer Harry thought about it, the clearer the picture became. In the morning he went down to the pocket-sized lobby and looked through a stack of newspapers. Some of them were almost a week old. He found the one he wanted and read all about the way Harry Clifford had died in a fiery accident coming over the pass.

From the description of the scene, he recognized the spot. It was a steep downgrade where trucks were warned to shift into low, and where an old sedan,

with brakes set to give out under pressure, would have been a set-up for disaster. And if the brakes didn't go, who would be the wiser? There would be another day and another downgrade.

"What's a couple of weeks more," Clark had said, "when we've waited so long?"

Yes, the picture was coming clear, but how could he be sure? He couldn't go to the police. He was a dead man, and he had to remain a dead man to get even a chance at that fifty thousand. For the same reason, he couldn't go to Corrine, or Clark, or even Max Kelley. There was nothing to do but wait. Watch, wait, and plan, because it seemed more and more to Harry that this whole set-up was just like a billiard game. The three-ball combination was on again, and this time there was nothing wrong with his vision . . .

Fifty thousand dollars could be awfully conspicuous. On the day Corrine came home with all those expensive looking boxes from Bullock's Pasedena, a shabby-looking man with a sunbrowned face and a heavy mustache was mowing the lawn across the street from the stucco apartment house.

Corrine didn't notice the gardener, but he noticed her. He noticed even more that evening when Clark Jefferies came around in a new convertible and they drove off together looking like a pair of well-heeled cats covered with canary feathers.

A few days later, Max Kelley started having a new front put on his garage and a new hydraulic hoist installed inside. Max was showing a few canary feathers, too . . .

Then it was Friday. On Friday the banks were open until five P.M. At four-thirty Max Kelley received a telephone call.

"Acme garage? I'd like to speak to Max Kelley, please."

"This is Kelley," Max said.

"Well, this is Lieutenant Huston calling from police headquarters—homicide. We're investigating an accident that occurred a few weeks ago. Certain evidence has turned up that creates some doubt that it was an accident after all."

"Accident?" Max repeated weakly.

"Harry Clifford. You did some work on his car just before he left on that fatal trip—remember?"

Max remembered. It took a few seconds of silence, but he remembered.

"Sure, that's right. I did a tune-up job. You know, plugs, carburetor—"

"What about the brakes? Weren't they relined?"

"The brakes?" A few more seconds of silence and then: "The brakes were in bad shape, Lieutenant. Real bad. I'd been at Mr. Clifford to get them fixed for a

long time, but he was a hard man with a dollar. I told all that to the insurance investigator right after the accident."

"That's peculiar," Lieutenant Huston said, "because we just found a work order from your garage locked up in the glove compartment of that wreck where the fire didn't touch it. The reline job is the first item listed, and the bill is marked paid right over your signature."

Max Kelly didn't say anything. Not anything at all.

"Maybe it slipped your mind," the lieutenant said.

"Maybe it did," Max answered.

"And maybe it doesn't mean anything. But you know how insurance companies are. They never give up on a suspicious case, even after the money's been paid. I think you'd better look up your duplicate of this work order, Kelley, and have it handy first thing in the morning. I'd come over right now, but I want to check with the insurance investigator. He's working on another angle of the case."

"Another angle?" Max echoed.

"Nothing to interest you, Kelley. Just a little information we have that Mrs. Clifford hasn't been lonely since she was left a widow. Nothing to interest you at all."

Harry Clifford put the receiver back on the hook and stepped out of the telephone booth. He looked happy. Being a dead man could be much more interesting than being alive. He walked very resolutely down the hall.

He'd phoned from the foyer of the building that housed Clark Jefferies' office. Outside a pair of wide plate-glass doors, he paused and looked inside. Nobody at any of the twin rows of desks seemed to be doing much work, perhaps because it was getting close to quitting time. Corrine wasn't there, of course. Corrine had retired. But then he saw Clark reaching for the phone on his desk and the scene became more interesting.

Clark didn't do much talking. He did a lot of listening, very little talking—and turned pale. When the conversation was over, he put the phone back on the cradle and stared into space for several minutes. Then his eyes moved up to the clock on the wall, and he reached for the phone again. This time he did the dialing.

Harry didn't linger in the hall any longer. The cue ball had struck its mark. He knew where the play would go from there. He left the office building and walked down the street until he came to the cafe across the street from the First National Bank. He ordered a cup of coffee and took it to a booth next to the window. He didn't have long to wait before Corrine came into

view, walking fast and glancing at the watch on her wrist.

It was ten minutes before closing time when she entered the bank. Then minutes later she came out again hugging her handbag under her arm as if it contained something valuable. The major portion of fifty thousand dollars, for instance.

Harry left the cafe and followed at a discreet distance. She made one stop on her way home. She stopped at the airlines ticket office and came out a few minutes later stuffing an envelope into her already overstuffed handbag. Harry waited until she was out of sight and then he went inside.

"My wife was just in here buying a pair of tickets," he said. "The lady who just went out. I wonder if she left her gloves on the counter."

The ticket clerk looked, but there were no gloves.

"She must have dropped them on the street then," Harry said. "Thanks, anyway . . . By the way, when does our plane leave again?"

The clerk looked up the listing of the list ticket sale. It was a sneaky way of getting information, but it worked. Harry got the time and flight number, and picked up a schedule for good measure. It was just as he expected. The object ball was heading for the pocket.

It was dark when he went back to the stucco apartment house. Clark Jefferies' convertible was parked outside. Harry walked back to the bedroom window again. This time the lights were on and the voices sounded a bit strained.

"But what about Kelley?" he heard Corrine ask. "What if he talks?"

"How can he?" Clark answered. "He's in this as deep as we are—deeper, in fact. Hurry up the packing, can't you? You can't take all this stuff along on a plane anyway."

Harry grinned in the darkness. The pressure was on and the tempers were rising. And Clark was crazy if he thought he could talk Corrine into leaving any of those nice, new clothes. It sounded as if the packing would keep them busy for some time, and so Harry walked around to the front entrance and let himself into the apartment with his key.

It seemed strange coming back after all these weeks and finding everything the same. The same furniture, and the same lamps, the same stack of magazines on the coffee table. Everything unchanged except the voices in the bedroom. They had no ears for him. They weren't expecting a dead man. He went to his desk and took a gun out of the bottom drawer.

He hadn't as much as looked at the gun for years, but it was loaded. Then he hesitated, debating whether to tie a handker-

chief over his face or confront them openly. It would be worth almost as much as the money to see Corrine's face when recognition came. And Clark's. By all means, loyal old friend of the family Clark!

And then Harry's gaze fell on an unexpected sight. Corrine had left her handbag on the desk—the same bag she'd carried on her hurried errand that afternoon. He opened it. The envelope with the airline tickets was inside, and another envelope that was much thicker and far more interesting.

He could hardly believe this stroke of luck. Corrine had helped plot her own husband's murder for this envelope of money, and then left it lying about as careless as confetti. He considered the windfall for a few seconds and then reached a decision.

Five minutes later, Harry was making another call from a booth at the corner drugstore.

"Mr. Kelly? This is Lieutenant Huston again. I hate to bother you at home like this, but I just want to warn you against trying to leave town tonight. Not that I think one of those plane tickets Mrs. Clifford bought this afternoon was meant for you—"

There was a peculiar sound on the opposite end of the wire as if Max Kelly might be swallowing the mouthpiece.

"Tickets?" he choked.

"Two tickets to Mexico City. She must be intending to stay a while, too. She withdrew a balance of nearly fifty thousand dollars from her bank this afternoon. Unfortunately, we don't have a shred of evidence to hold her on. But I want to make sure you're on hand tomorrow to explain about those brakes."

Harry put up the receiver and strolled back to the apartment house. The lights were still on in the bedroom and the voices were getting louder and more strained. About ten minutes later, a car pulled up in front and Max Kelly got out. Harry caught a glimpse of his face as he hurried inside. He looked mad enough to kill.

It would be interesting, Harry reflected, as he sauntered off into the darkness, to stick around just long enough to see what happened when three panic-stricken people met over a handbag containing two plane tickets to Mexico City and a gun containing—well, it would be interesting. But luck is a fickle thing. It can ride on your shoulder like a big brass epaulet, and then turn green and crumble away just when you need it the most.

Even a dead man shouldn't push luck too far. Especially a dead man with nearly fifty thousand dollars in his pocket.

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the invisible murderer

by . . . Carter Dickson

H. G. Wells' Invisible Man created quite a stir five decades ago. But Colonel March could *see* the gent—in modern crime apparel.

A TAXI BROUGHT him to the Derby Street entrance of New Scotland Yard. He was a well-dressed man with somewhat protuberant eyes, an inquiring nose, and a frantic seriousness of manner. And he was so excited that the constable on duty at the entrance could hardly make out a word he was saying.

"Murdered him right in front of me!" gabbled the newcomer, holding to his bowler hat as though it might blow off. "He might have murdered me, too, and very nearly did, because the next bullet hit the lampshade beside me, and—"

"Now, sir!" urged the Law soothingly. "Who did all this?"

"A pair of gloves did. Only they didn't have any hands inside them. Or any arms or body either, for that matter. The fellow was invisible. And mark my words, he'll kill that girl next!"

The constable stood back and studied him. This man did not look demented. His eyes were

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Originally published as "The New Invisible Man" and taken from the book entitled THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS.
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watery, and he gulped out steamy breaths on the raw air.

"Yes, sir," said the constable. "Straight on; first turning; third door on the left."

He spoke a formula. The door he indicated bore only the words, D-3, COLONEL MARCH, but many stories lay behind it. It is, in fact, the home of queer tales, and exists solely for the purpose of receiving them. To the Metropolitan Police come strangers with complaints which do not seem to bear the light of day or reason. But unless the complainant is an obvious lunatic, such matters have to be investigated; and Department D-3 is their clearing-house.

D-3 has its own staff, notably Inspector (ex-Captain) Roberts, who served under Colonel March in different days. It is not governed by the routine organization, and deals direct with the Commissioner's office. Some maintain that Colonel March was put in charge of it because nothing on earth could possibly surprise him. He is also well served by his vast fund of good-for-nothing information, and his absorption of any kind of puzzle from a jig-saw up. Those who get past Inspector Roberts find in the inner office a large, amiable man with a speckled face, an interested blue eye, and a very short pipe projecting from under a cropped mustache which might be sandy or gray.

On this particular morning, the agitated man in the bowler hat did get past the outer office. Business, as Colonel March pointed out to Inspector Roberts, was bad; and they might as well hear what the man had to say.

"I am aware," said the newcomer, with a certain dignity, "that you must think me mad. Very well. Say that I *am mad*—" His native caution checked him. "Er—no, don't say that. Perhaps I am a little upset. But surely my name and standing should be sufficient guarantee that I am telling the truth? My name is Rodman, Horace Rodman. I am the senior partner of Rodman and Hughes, Chartered Accountants and Income Tax Consultants. I have lived for sixteen years at Number twenty-four St. Nicholas Row, Hampstead. Sir, I saw a murder done; and Heaven help me, nobody will believe it."

His voice had acquired an asthmatic and passionate note.

"It's quite all right," March assured him. "I knew a fellow once who had the same trouble. Just fire away."

"I'm not sure I know how," said Rodman abruptly, after a pause. He reflected. "It concerns a new block of flats which has just gone up opposite my house in St. Nicholas Row." He reflected again. "A number of houses were torn down to make room for the flats. My friend,

Mrs. Atchison, of Number eighteen, told me she was not sorry to see Number twenty-three go, because it certainly had an unpleasant reputation in her grandfather's time."

"You mean it was supposed to be haunted?" asked March, with still greater interest.

"No, no, no!" exclaimed the other. "I did not say so," he added. "And I cannot imagine any—er 'haunt' transferring itself to the modernistic building across the way. I must tell you about the architecture; it has a great deal of bearing on what I saw. You have probably noticed these new Spanish-style buildings, in yellow stucco with green facings, where every corner is rounded, and every room has one long window stretching entirely across it, like the glass door of a bookcase? Eh? Yes. That was how I could see so clearly.

"You see, the flats are not yet quite finished. Although there are a number of 'let' signs in the windows, only three or four families have moved in. I am interested in my fellow-man, sir," said Mr. Rodman, rather defiantly. "I'm a student of human nature, and I don't care who knows it. Well, I *had* noticed the couple occupying the four-room flat which is directly opposite the second floor windows of my house. They are—or profess to be—a Mr. and Mrs. James Hartley. The husband is a nondescript young man, who drives an old Hillman coupé, and has an office in the city. The wife is a really beautiful, and, I believe, refined girl."

His sudden lyricism embarrassed him.

"I had several times noticed the young lady going in and out; and once I met her in the street. I have also seen her, with a dust-cloth round her head, cleaning the windows opposite. Mrs. Achison thought this unbecoming in her. So did Mr. and Miss Paulus, at Number twenty. I can only say," declared Mr. Rodman emphatically, "that I don't agree. She has hair the color of ripe—well, such is the case. This much I can tell you: she is in very terrible fear of something. For God's sake do not think I am imagining things for one reason or another. If you had seen her face, as I did, after it happened . . .

"It happened, you see, only last night, February twelfth, when I was going up to bed. My bedroom is on the second-floor front. I usually retire punctually at eleven; but I was a little later than usual, because I had been fidgety all evening. I don't know why.

"Before turning on the light in my bedroom, I went across to draw the curtains. That is how I came to be looking straight across, not forty feet away, into the dark window opposite. No

curtains have been put up there. It is not Mr. and Mrs. Hartley's bedroom or sitting-room. As a matter of fact, it is not yet furnished, except for carpets which have been fitted throughout, and one or two odds and ends packed away there. I had seen it by daylight, and knew it for a room hardly more than ten feet square, raw enough, with cream-painted walls, cream-varnished doors, and gray carpeting.

"It was a quiet night, and very cold. In front of the flats there is a double street-lamp, which threw a faint kind of glow up over the yellow-and-green building and high up through the window. Someone, bent low, was moving quickly and stealthily round that room. It might be nothing? Ordinarily one might have thought so. But the man was carrying an automatic pistol, and wore a big pair of dirty white-cotton gloves. I saw one of them flatten out against the window like a starfish."

Rodman paused. Colonel March's big sandy-haired head was bent forward with concentration. He glanced sideways at Inspector Roberts, who was now not quite so sure of the visitor's lack of mental balance.

"You could see all this," said March, "from across the street?"

"I fetched a pair of field-glasses," said Rodman with sudden loftiness. "Kindly do not interrupt me. The man took off his gloves, and put them down with the pistol on a round table in the middle of the room. Then he came towards the window and turned on the light. It was a dusty electric bulb, hanging from an unshaded socket in the ceiling near the window. But it gave a passable light; and I had a good look at the man's face.

"It was not James Hartley, or any man I had seen in those flats. I tell you I knew he was an old scoundrel, from the very turn of his very neck and hands. He was a wicked-faced old man with a drooping mustache and thick-lensed spectacles which gave him an intensity of stare rather like the pictures of Doctor Crippen. His overcoat had a fur collar, too. And he began to run his hands along the window-ledge, as though he were searching for something.

"Please remember the bareness of that room. I could see all of it. There was nobody else there. It had three cream-painted doors —one in the rear wall, in line with the window, and one in each of the two side walls. I should have noticed if any door had been moved an inch. Not one did. The only articles of furniture were an ordinary kitchen chair, near the window: and the bare table in the center, on which the man had put down his pistol and gloves. A box with three doors and a window. There

wasn't a crevice where anyone could have hidden.

"The man began groping along the window-ledge. Finally he opened one big pane of the window and put out his bald head. I remember his shadow from the street lamp climbing up the yellow stucco wall. He uttered a peculiar kind of whistle, which sounded very loud in the quiet street. Then he drew in his head and turned back to the door at the rear of the room as he was in the act of locking the window.

"If that whistle was a signal, he got an answer. Two shots were fired at him point-blank.

"They were fired, I tell you, from the other side of that table in the middle of the room, between the table and the rear door. They were fired from the heavy automatic which had been lying on the table. I saw them fired. The first bullet struck him in the chest and kicked him back against the window-ledge, where he fell. The second bullet missed him, drilled through his window, and broke the glass shade of the lamp not a foot from my head. I saw the hand that fired the pistol; but there was no other person in that room."

Rodman nodded his head twice. "I have the bullet, you know," he added with ghoulish hopefulness. "I dug it out of the wall in my bedroom and brought it along."

Colonel March was refreshed. His large face wore a quizzical look which was not disbelief at all; he tapped his fingers on the desk separating him from Rodman, as though he were about to make a move in a game of chess.

"Just a moment," he interposed, "while I make sure I understand you. You *saw* this pistol fire the shots?"

"I did."

"Where was the pistol, exactly?"

Rodman changed color. "Held by one of the big gloves, at the back of the room."

"Was it on the table?"

"No, above the table."

"I see. You were actually looking through the place where the murderer must have been standing?"

"I was."

"Excellent! Any comments, Roberts?"

Inspector Roberts smiled. "Well, sir, it's interesting enough. But where's the corpse? People usually complain in the case of a murder, you know. Mr. Rodman says this occurred last night. That would be F Division. I was talking to the Divisional-Inspector only this morning, and he said nothing about it."

"Oh, yes, I am aware of that," snapped Rodman, still a curious color. "You see, I haven't told

you the worst of it yet. Shall I go on? Thank you.

"I was alarmed. I'm not ashamed to admit that. For a few seconds I couldn't move. I knew I had to go over there: duty. Besides, I was curious. But I had to find a policeman first. I hurried downstairs, got my hat and coat, and went outside. There was no difficulty about finding a policeman. The man on the beat had heard the shots too, and was coming to investigate. The window in the flat was now dark. I told the policeman what I had seen, though I dare say he didn't take it all in, for one reason or another. We entered the flats together.

"There were two lifts, but they didn't work. There was a porter, but we couldn't find him. We were in a great concrete shell of a building, rasping to every echo, and with a few frosted-glass lights. But I knew—Mrs. Atchison had found out—the number of the Hartley's flat. We went upstairs and knocked. After a minute or two Mrs. Hartley opened the door. Her first name is Elizabeth, or Betty. She was wearing a pink dressing-gown, and looked as though she had been roused out of bed. But she was frightened; I could tell that. The trouble was—"

"Well?" prompted Colonel March.

"She swore there was absolutely nothing wrong in the flat; that she had been in bed, and had heard no shots. The constable said quite sensibly: 'Well, ma'am, there were shots, because I heard them myself; and this gentleman says one of them nearly killed him.' She said that the inner walls of the flat were soundproof. It is only fair to admit that this is true.

"We demanded to be shown the unfurnished room. She made no difficulty about this. It opened off the central hall, where odds and ends of lumber were stacked in confusion: a sewing machine, a big box full of framed photographs, sheets of printed paper, a folding Japanese screen through which the constable unfortunately put his foot. We cleared this away, and went in. That was when I began to have a queer sensation that something spongy had got into my head where the brain ought to be.

"For the old man I had seen, alive or dead, was not in the room. And there was no bullet hole in the window.

"There was no bullet hole in the window," he repeated.

"Gentlemen, I think that bewildered me more than the absence of the victim. There might have been time for a victim to have been carried away or hidden before we arrived. I say *might*. But a solid thirty-eight calibre bullet—I have it here—had gone through the glass of the window before it went through the glass

of mine; and there was not a scratch here to show where it had passed. Gloves and pistol were also missing.

"The policeman, I admit, looked at me oddly. I went round that room like—I had almost said like a terrier sniffing. I don't care! Let me assure you that there was no possibility of my having been mistaken about the room, or got the wrong room. There is only one place on a direct line with my bedroom; you must test it as I did then.

"I saw the gray carpeting, the cream walls. Here was the kitchen chair. Here was the table. Here were the three equidistant doors; the rear one opened into the hall, the right-hand one opened into the sitting-room, and the left-hand one into an empty linen-closet. The only thing I had been unable to see from my bedroom was a radiator under the window. The only mark of any kind in the room was a long triangular indentation in the pile of the carpet, where, Mrs. Hartley explained, the folding Japanese screen had stood before they cleared the room of lumber.

"Now, Mrs. Hartley was terrified of something. That I'll swear. She has very expressive hazel eyes, and she did not even seem to hear what I was saying. She stood there with her face flushed, hugging her dressing gown round her in the cold, but she seemed as much puzzled as terrified. I warned her, for her own good, that if she was having anything to do with thieves and killers she would regret it."

He moved his neck. "The worst of it occurred when her husband came bursting in, tying on *his* dressing gown, and alleging that *he* had been roused by our voices 'yelling' in his flat in the middle of the night. I was not yelling. But he was in a vile temper. His hair, which was rumpled, stuck straight out in front like the peak of a cap. And his face, which I should have described as nondescript and rather unpleasant, now looked concretely sinister.

"By this time the constable had grown apologetic, but I would have none of this. 'Never apologize, never explain' is my motto—an aristocratic motto, if I may say so. Hartley, I am afraid, was angry. He denied that he had ever seen or heard of the old man.

" 'So,' he said, 'you saw a pair of gloves pick up a gun and shoot somebody who doesn't exist? Blast my ears with lightning! Did you wake me up in the middle of the night just to tell me that? You didn't see a line of cigars hanging in the air and smoking themselves, did you? Look at this flat. It's an ordinary flat, or at least I thought it was. Look at this door. It's a practical door, and no invisible

man walked through it. If you want to search the place, go ahead. And then, get out.'

"But this did not last. When we went into the sitting-room, where it was warm, something occurred that struck the anger off his face. Up to that time I was at my wits' end. Perhaps I talked sharply, and turned things out of drawers. But I am accustomed to being obeyed unquestionably, as any clerk of mine will tell you. Then I knew I was right, for I saw it: a photograph, in an old-fashioned frame, brightly lighted by a table-lamp. There was no mistaking those staring, spectacled eyes. It was a photograph of the old man who had disappeared.

"Hartley knew that I had seen it, and his expression altered. The whole atmosphere of the room changed, too. He made a quick movement to get in front of the picture, or snatch it away, but I was there ahead of him. His forward movement was so violent that he slipped on the smooth pile of the carpet. He must have twisted his ankle, for he went down with a crash that turned him pale. Mrs. Hartley ran to him, screaming his first name. When she lifted up his shoulders I was rather appalled by the look she gave me. For what had I done?

"A few minutes later I was out in the street, advised by the constable to go home. They showed me proofs of the truth. I could not doubt the truth, and you will sympathize with me when I say I had the horrors all night. But I'm a taxpayer, and a decent citizen, and I insist on knowing the meaning of it. That photograph was a picture of Hartley's grandfather, who died before the war."

At this point, quietly, a constable came into the room with an official form filled up. There was a rattle as Inspector Roberts put coal on the fire. The echo of Rodman's shrill voice still seemed to linger. Firelight grew brighter in the big room while Roberts used the poker. And the constable said: "A Mr. and Mrs. Hartley to see you, sir."

"Ask Mr. and Mrs. Hartley to wait a moment," said Colonel March blandly.

He got up and went over to stand with his back to the fire. He had the military trick of standing as though bent a little forward from the waist, his arms slightly curved at his sides; but this stiffness contrasted with the amusement of his speckled face. A bland blue eyes surveyed them, and his short pipe seemed in danger of scorching his nose as he sniffed amusedly at it.

"We must discuss the matter first," he explained. "Mr. Rodman, I rather envy you. Your adventure is what a younger generation would describe as hot stuff."

"If," said Rodman, freezing up, "you prefer to make fun of—"

"Not at all," the other assured him. "I believe every word you say."

Inspector Roberts, though youngish, was well trained. He did not actually drop the poker with which he was stirring the fire, though he looked as if it had been a near thing.

"You think," cried Rodman, "I saw a—?"

"Ghost? Oh, no." Colonel March added, as though consolingly. "Not this time, anyhow."

"Then it was a real crime after all? A real man was shot with a real bullet in that room? Is that what you think?"

"I am quite sure of it."

Rodman seemed as taken aback as though he had never believed. "But how? I ask you, *how?* There was nobody in the room: there was no corpse, as your friend says. There was no bullet hole in the window. There was—"

"Wait a bit," urged March. "Never mind your notebook for the moment, Roberts. Before we consider any course of action, I should like to dig a few more gems out of our friend's admirable narrative style. Mr. Rodman, how long have the Hartleys lived in that flat?"

"Two weeks last Monday, I think."

"Previous to last night, had you ever been inside the room where the man was shot?"

"Never."

"That little table in the room, now. You said it was a round table. Was it also a three-legged table?"

"Didn't I tell you it was? But please listen to me," begged Rodman, as though he had not been able to get a word in edgeways. "If a man was killed there, who was he? I've questioned people till I'm blue in the face, and nobody ever saw him or heard of him. Where's his body? And how was it done? And did Hartley kill him? I ask you, as a public servant, to answer relevant questions, if you can think of any answer. What difference does it make if the table had three legs or four legs? Or whether the room had one door or two doors or six doors, for that matter?"

"On the contrary," said Colonel March, "the number of doors is very important. If there had been only one door in the room, the criminal would not have been able to act."

"But I tell you nobody went in or out by any of the doors!"

"Oh, that," said Colonel March. "I quite agree with you."

"Then—"

"No, you don't," said the other with ferocious geniality. He pointed his finger. "You're enjoying yourself immensely.

You never got such a thrill in your life as you've had out of this. You came here with the particular purpose of mystifying me, to spread the glad tidings of terror to a wider audience than Mrs. Achison; and now you are damned well going over the same jumps you set for me. Ask Mr. and Mrs. Hartley to come in."

It might be wondered how Rodman's description of this couple coincided with the facts. It is possible that his account of Mrs. Hartley, at least, was colored by a romantic imagination. Betty Hartley did not seem ethereal or spiritual. She was a good-looking, healthy-looking girl whose grave hazel eyes were redeemed by dimples at the corners of the mouth; a brown velour hat was tilted over her thick yellow hair. Her husband, peering over her shoulder, had rather a strong face with a trace of irony in it. They both stopped dead on the threshold when they saw Rodman.

"Oh, bother!" said the girl explosively.

"Come in," said Colonel March, teetering before the fire. "Come in and sit down. This is Inspector Roberts. The other one I think you know. Mr. Rodman has been telling us a very interesting story."

"I don't doubt it," observed Hartley with an air of gloom. "Well, what do you think?"

"I think," said Colonel March, "that you were very foolish to come here."

Rodman had been right about one thing at least: Betty Hartley was afraid.

"He insisted on coming," she said. "I told him not to come. I begged him not to, though not for the reason you may be thinking. We came here to give our version of what happened the other night. But since Mr. Rodman has been good enough to—"

"My dear young lady," said Rodman, as though he were beginning a letter. He tried to soften this. "Please see, try to see, that I am acting in your own interests. Look at you: you're trembling. I have always made my own decisions in this life, and—"

Betty Hartley spoke fretfully. She said: "Oh, dry up!"

"As for me," remarked Hartley with a cheerful air, "I hold by the *corpus delicti*. I wouldn't like to swear how the thing works, but I know it gives a devil of a lot of trouble in detective stories. You can't hang me until you can produce the victim's teeth or whiskers. And I hope, conversely, that I'm not to blame if a ghost walks on the premises." His tone changed, and he looked up. "Why was I foolish to come here?"

Colonel March's voice became sharp. "Because, if I know your

symptoms at all, you ought to be at home in bed," March answered. "You must have a nasty bullet wound in your shoulder where your wife shot you last night."

There was a silence of such bursting quality that they even became aware of dim outer noises in the building—the passing of footsteps or the closing of a door. It took a little time for the words to sink in.

Mr. Horace Rodman got to his feet, and sat down again. He has since described—to Mrs. Atchison—that he has seldom been so taken aback in his life—especially at the scared face of Betty Hartley. But he was just as taken aback by the subsequent amusement. Hartley had sat down, looking less ill. And both Hartley and Colonel March were chuckling.

"So you spotted it," said Hartley. "Well, thank the Lord for that."

"Furthermore," insisted the colonel, with an expression of great pleasure nevertheless, "if you don't put your arm back in that sling again, you'll get into serious trouble with the doctor. Mrs. Hartley, I beg your pardon. I know the shooting wasn't a part of the game, but I hardly think you'll get into any difficulty over—"

"I don't see how you can stand there and laugh," cried the girl. "It was horrible. And you don't understand! I—"

"I hope I understand," said the colonel. He turned to Hartley. "You're a theatrical producer, aren't you?"

"And doing well," agreed the other with decision. "Two fairly good runs in two years. Not West End, maybe. But wait! So you've heard of me, eh? Which one did you see, *The Riddle in Red* or *Dead Voices?*"

Colonel March was apologetic. "As a matter of fact, neither. Mr. Rodman's painstaking account of your talk made it seem likely, and *you* said, 'Look at this door. It's a practical door.' The choice of term was distinctive. A practical door or window, meaning a real one, is a word used exclusively in stage terminology. The big box of framed photographs suggested the theatre, as the sheets of printed paper suggested playbills. But when I heard about the long triangular indentation in the pile of the carpet, just as used by your famous predecessor, I felt sure you were trying out a variation of the original illusion. D'you mind telling me what you were up to?"

"Stage version of *The Invisible Man,*" replied Hartley with enthusiasm. "Never been done. And I can do it. Look! If I take—" He broke off. "You know the basis of the tricks?"

"It deserves to be mentioned with reverence," said March in

equal enthusiasm. "It is a variation of the first really revolutionary stage-illusion of modern times. The magician and illusionist, Colonel Stodare, presented it first as 'The Sphinx' in eighteen six-five. On the same principle the great Maskelyne built his Disappearing Cabinet, and it has been the foundation of nearly every ghost-illusion since.

"This is how 'The Sphinx' was presented. In the middle of three sides of a black-draped stage stood a circular table with three legs. On this table appeared a severed head without a body. It talked, answered questions. Yet the audience could see over, under, and through the table to assure themselves there was no person there. Ah, you remember it?

"Now imagine a square, which is the stage. In the center of the square imagine a triangle, formed by the three legs of the table, with its apex or point towards the audience. In each of the two long sides of the triangle—towards the audience—is set a looking-glass. You think you are seeing under the table to the back wall. What you actually see is the reflection of the two side walls and floor, similar black curtains and carpeting, coming together to form a perfect whole. The invisible body, of course, is hidden by the two sheets of looking-glass.

"You, Mr. Hartley, made an ingenious improvement on it. Your room had three white-painted doors, exactly the same on three sides. Your Sphinx-table stood in the middle. One of the looking-glasses would reflect half of the under part of the door on the right; the other would reflect half of the under part of the door on the left. The walls were the same; carpet was fitted up to the baseboards. A watcher opposite would apparently see under the table—to the rear wall, carpet, and rear door: which door was really the fitted-together reflection of the doors on either side.

"In your sinister Crippen role, evilly mustached, you had to take certain precautions. You had to wait until you were in the room, until you had put down gloves and pistol on the table and moved to the window, before you could turn on the light. Otherwise you would have been seen smack in the looking-glass. Afterwards, a pair of gloves, ably played by your wife and helpmate, could be made to appear above the table and perform what antics they liked. The invisible man!"

Hartley made a gesture of silent applause. Betty Hartley was almost in tears. But by this time Mr. Horace Rodman had reached a point of hysteria.

"Illusion!" he howled. "Don't tell me I saw an illusion. I won't

believe it. I won't have it. A real bullet broke my window. It nearly killed me. But it went through their window without—"

"You play this one," Hartley said politely to Colonel March.

"Thank you," said the colonel. "Correct me if I am wrong: that was an error. That was not intended, any more than you were intended to be shot."

March turned to Rodman. "I rather think that part of it is clear, from your own recital. When you went bursting into their flat that night, it was very cold in the little room. You particularly commented to me on how cold it was. But there was a radiator in that room, and the flat was centrally heated throughout. In the next breath you explained how you went into the sitting-room, where it was quite warm.

"Am I being deeply subtle if I suggest that it was cold because the window—or one pane of it —had been open for some little time? You pointed out that several panes of those long windows open out like little doors. The terrible mustached figure opened one pane, stuck his head out, and whistled to attract your attention in case he hadn't already done so. He left a few inches open, and didn't think to lock it again until you broke in with the policeman some time afterwards. I rather think that is how the bullet crept out."

Hartley was nursing his arm and musing.

"My dear old Grandpop," he said, "the most villainous-looking old coot who ever carried a collection plate in church. I have impersonated him, under the stimulus of his picture, in several repertory-productions."

"I think I must be going mad," Rodman interrupted, staring at Colonel March. "What did I hear you say? 'Whistled to attract my attention?' Attract *my* attention? Why?"

Hartley looked politely at his wife. "And *you* play this one," he said.

"I will," said Betty, seeming to bristle up inside. She turned on Rodman. "Do you know what you are?"

"My dear young lady—"

The dear young lady rose in a glory of rage.

"Do you know what you've been doing? You and your precious Mrs. Atchison? Do you deny you've been snooping and spying on us, just as you do on everyone else you can, only worse, ever since we've moved into that flat? You've tried to find out everything about us you can. You've stood up there with a pair of field-glasses and followed me from room to room, making life a perfect misery to me. I'll bet—"

("Better see that the door is closed," Colonel March said to Hartley.)

"—and, since we were going to test the mirror-illusion anyway, I thought we'd just teach you a good lesson, and scare your hair off. I suppose it's all my fault, really. I thought that was a property-gun, loaded with blanks. Only it wasn't. And I'm glad I broke your beastly old window, anyway. But when we saw what an awful row we'd caused with real shots, we had to pretend it didn't happen, or you'd have had us in the police-court for shooting at you. Jim would have had to explain what he was about, and ruined the play—"

"Light of my life—" began her husband pacifically.

"And, of course, Jim would go on. I had to hold you off while he got rid of the grandfather make-up and slid the mirrors out from the grooves in the table and hid them, and closed the window. Oh, I don't mind anything else. But I can't forgive you for being so virtuous and triumphant when you grabbed that photograph, and saw Jim slip and land with his full weight on the carpet just after he'd g-got a bullet—and wasn't able—"

"You'll have to say it another time, Mrs. Hartley," said Inspector Roberts, looking out of the open door. "Mr. Rodman seems to have left us in a hurry."

She grew calmer, and said impishly: "That's off my chest, anyhow. I'm terribly sorry, though. Can he prosecute us?"

"Somehow," said Hartley, "I don't think he will. When this story begins to circulate—no, I don't think he will. With regard to his future conduct, too; when the butcher and the candlestick-maker hear their version of his heroic conduct, he will be—"

Colonel March nodded magnificently, like an emperor.

"Exactly," he said. "The real invisible man."

the inglorious swindle

by . . . Edwin Baird

Scotty could talk himself in and out of a swindle with all of his winnings sewed up tight. But one cute trick he overlooked.

I'LL SAY THIS for Scotty. He's a smooth worker and he does get a smart idea now and then. One of the smartest is that if you want to get dough you've got to *look* like dough and go where the dough is. And you'll go farther and fare better if you get a wench to string along with you—though Big Dan O'Sullivan may be right in affirming that the dame factor can be dynamite.

Anyway, that's how it is we find Scotty in the finest hotel in town—I'll let you guess the name of it—feeding a fast line to the cute number at the newsstand.

She's a well turned out number, with her dark hair and eyes, and her ability to send as well as receive, and Scotty takes an increased interest in her when she waves a greeting to a long, skinny guy walking across the lobby. He looks like the sort who might say to a girl 'If you'll wait here in the vestibule, I'll bring the etchings down to you.' A very subtle gent, if you get what I mean.

"Haven't I seen that gentle-

In a fascinating volume of reminiscences, both literary and profane, MacKinlay Kantor refers more than once to Edwin Baird, and a certain sturdily constructed pipeline to REAL DETECTIVE TALES, *through which Mr. Baird was in the habit of dispatching checks to now famous writers. But it is not only as an editor that Edwin Baird has left glowing footprints on memory lane. He shines as a writer too—and never more brightly than in this, his finest, short story.*

man before?" asks Scotty. "His face seems familiar."

"I should think it would!" Scotty's interest says. "It's in the papers every day. That gentleman," she adds, "is Vladimir Kitcheboof."

"Oh, yes—sure. I place him now. Is he a friend of yours?"

"One of the best friends a girl ever had, and always a perfect gentleman."

That's all Scotty needs to know. He gives the office to Big Dan, who's lurking in the lobby keeping a watchful eye on things. Very majestic, like a polar bear mushing through a snowdrift, Big Dan comes mushing through the crowd, and sounds off in his booming voice: "Tim, me boy! And how are tricks with you this day?"

"Never better, Mr. McClanahan," Scotty says. "Speaking of tricks, I'd like you to meet my charming little friend here, Miss Dolores—"

"Maggie's the name, if you please," says the girl. "How d'you do, Mr. McClanahan?"

"As if your cared!" says Dan, hardly glancing at her. "Tim m'lad, I've something hot for you. La Marie in the first at Lincoln Fields."

With a jovial nod Big Dan swings about and shoves off on his snowshoes. Maggie watches his ponderous departure and skins her lip back from her teeth.

"Snooty hippopotamus!" she says. "Who is he, anyway?"

"Why," says Scotty, "that's Jeremiah McClanahan. Don't tell me you never heard of *him?* He's the biggest man on the American turf."

"That I can well believe," Maggie says. "He's as big as a stuffed whale."

"When Jeremiah McClanahan tells you a horse is hot—Look Maggie, do you ever bet on a horse race?"

"Not since I lost fifty cents on the Kentucky Derby. That was three years ago in a sort of pool. Never again!"

"Well, I'm advising you now to put fifty cents—or fifty dollars—on La Marie."

"No!"

"Then I'll do it for you," says Scotty. "I just want to show you that when Jeremiah McClanahan says a horse will win, your winnings are as good as in your pocket. I'll run along now and place our bet. See you tomorrow at about this time."

A little later he and Big Dan are in a room at their hotel—which is not the biggest in town nor yet the best—and Big Dan is saying: "Now then, what's the setup here?"

"It's like this," replies Scotty. "My little friend Maggie knows a guy who should be a quick pushover. Does the name Vladimir Kitcheboof mean anything to you?"

"Nothing," says Dan, "except that it sounds like a sneeze."

"Well, this Kitcheboof is not to be sneezed at. He's lousy with dough."

"How do you know?" Big Dan asks.

"You ought to read a newspaper once in a while," Scotty says reproachfully. "That's how I spotted the guy. I knew who he was the minute I set eyes on him. So we build him up through the girl and take him for plenty."

"I still don't like it," says Big Dan, pouring himself another drink. "The chief thing I'm uneasy about is this hookup with the girl."

"You're letting yourself forget," says Scotty, "that I've always been a pretty smart lad."

"One of the smartest things a smart lad can do," says Dan, "is to realize how dumb he can sometimes be."

But in the end he's sold on Scotty's plan. They look up old Hank Busch and by convincing him that their buildup is perfect they get from Hank a working capital of $3,000, to be returned in a week with interest attached.

The next step is for Scotty to see Maggie the following day at the magazine stand in the big hotel. He finds her looking very glum.

"Why so sad?" he says. "La Marie won, just as I told you she would." La Marie, of course, had already won when he told her that, for Dan had the results of the first race at Lincoln Fields.

"Yes, I know," she says. "But I didn't bet."

"I'm a man of my word," affirms Scotty, "and I made a bet for you. Here's your winnings." He removes a roll from his pocket and sheets off greenbacks.

At this juncture up walks Kitcheboof looking very precise and solemn. Introductions are made, and Maggie squeals in some excitement: "Mr. Kitcheboof, this gentleman knows a big racetrack man who can tell which horse will win before the race is run!"

While they're passing away on this, who should come lumbering toward them but the big racetrack man himself. And very upset he is too, by all this fuss in a public spot. He suggests they go to the cocktail lounge where they can discuss matters in privacy.

In the semi-seclusion of a plush booth he mentions a hot horse he has in the fifth at Delaware Park that very afternoon—Mug's Game by name.

"Your word, Mr. McClanahan," says Scotty, again lugging the roll from his pocket, "is good enough for me. Here's the five hundred I won on La Marie. You can put it all on Mug's Game."

Big Dan scoops up the dough and looks at his watch. "I must wire my betting commisioner,"

he says. "There's precious little time."

As a matter of fact, the fifth race had already been run at Delaware Park, and the winner, of course, was Mug's Game.

Now Kitcheboof snaps out of his daze. If this horse is such a sure thing, then why shouldn't he get a bite of the dough? He produces three century notes. "Will you please bet that for me?" he asks.

As a special favor, says Dan, he will, and slips the three C's in his poke.

As per appointment, Kitcheboof meets them next day in the cocktail lounge of the big hotel, and very pleased he is when Dan hands him a hefty roll and says: "Mug's Game paid better than eight to one, and here's your winnings, Mr. Kitcheboof."

It's now time for the grand payoff, the *coup de cleanup* as you might say. So when Kitcheboof has finished counting his dough, Big Dan goes into his razzle-dazzle act for really big-time cash on the barrelhead.

"So we take this thoroughbred animal," he goes on to say, "disguise it so it cannot be recognized and enter it in a maiden race. If we swing the thing right we stand to clean up half a million dollars."

"How much will it take to swing it?" asks Scotty.

"About sixty thousand dollars."

"You can count me in for a third of that."

"And I'll take another third," says Kitcheboof. "If you gentlemen will come up to my room—"

They get into an elevator and ride up to the top floor. Scotty gets off first, then big Dan. Kitcheboof steps off last and says, very sudden, "My room key? I left it at the desk. Will you gentlemen excuse me a moment?"

And before either can think to grab him, he's going back down in the elevator—thirty-nine floors—and going fast.

Dan and Scotty look at each other, and each sees the same thought in the other's face:

"He's got every dollar Hank loaned us!"

"Take after him!" says Dan. "You're quicker than me. I'll stay here on the million-to-one-chance he may come back."

It's some little time before another elevator stops at the floor, and it's an even longer time before Scotty gets back to the lobby.

Kitcheboof, of course, is no where in sight. Nor is the desk clerk any help.

"We've nobody registered here," says the clerk, after consulting his records, "by the name of Vladimir Kitcheboof."

Scotty takes a turn about the lobby and sees somebody else is missing—Maggie the magazine girl.

He asks the bell captain about

her, and gets just the reply he expects.

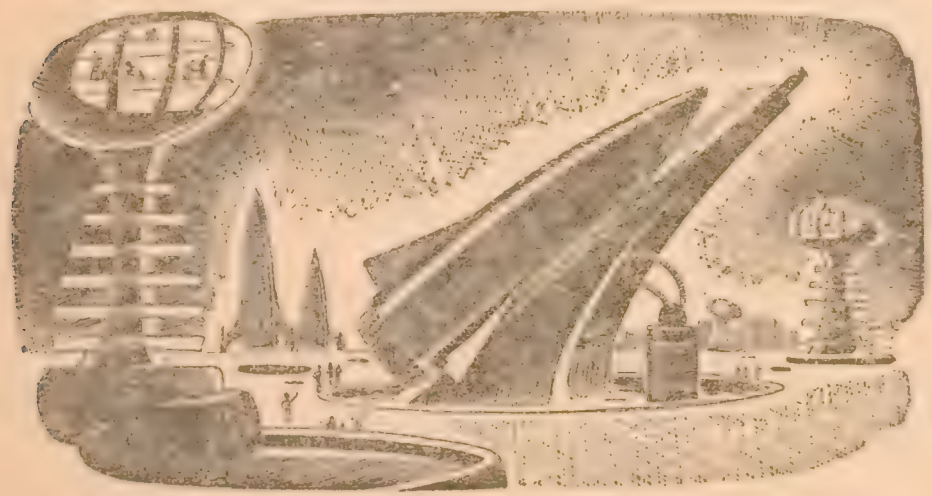
"Maggie's no longer with us. She left in a hurry just now."

Scotty takes a dollar bill from his pocket. "I'm not a betting man," says he, "but I'll wager this one-case note she left with a short stubby guy."

"You lose," says the head bellhop, taking the note. "The guy is long and skinny. He used to work here in the hotel haberdashery. Funny thing about Maggie," the bellhop goes on, "she's been wanting to marry this guy for a month. But neither could get enough dough, so here the other day she meets up with a couple o' con men—"

Scotty waits to hear no more, but goes back up to the thirty-ninth floor, where Dan is waiting for him, and what he's thinking about, as he tells me afterward, is something Dan had said to him:

"One of the smartest things a smart lad can do is to realize how dumb he can sometimes be."



A mystery magazine that appears alone on the newsstands, with no monthly companion to converse with across the array of assembled periodicals must feel a little isolated at times. THE SAINT *has no such problem. For in every issue of* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *its newsstand chum, so to speak, there's a truly dazzling array of the best new science fiction to keep conversation humming. Of course magazines can't converse. But this month, if they could, we can imagine* THE SAINT *whispering: "Your July issue goes over big with me! I'm glad we're together. There's high-voltage drama in* THE THINKING MACHINE *by Raymond F. Jones, and new frontiers of wonder in* THE REWRITE MAN *by Wilson Moore, and an undercurrent of suspense in* THE FOUNDING FATHERS *by Robert Bloch. Congratulations on a terrific lineup of top-echelon writers!"*

what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

An exciting lineup of new mystery titles makes this month a lively one in our alert critic's lexicon.

THE WITNESSES AND THE WATCHMAKER, two novels by Georges Simenon (Doubleday, $3.95), are new illustrations of the mildly schizoid quality of Simenon's writing. Simenon Number One reports, often in careful detail, on the cases of Chief Inspector Maigret, while Simenon Number Two reports on the minds and the thoughts of the Judges and the judged. It is not inconceivable that Simenon, in time, will be remembered less for his often unimaginatively translated reports on Paris police procedure, and more for his explorations into the motivations and personalities of men face-to-face with decisive moments in their lives.

Both novels are dedicated to the seldom-understood fact that it is impossible for one human being to understand another. But Judge Lhomond comes close to sharing the inner emotions of Dieudonné Lambert, accused of murdering his wife, in THE WITNESSES, and lonely Dave Galloway realizes, for a stricken

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In Clarence Budington Kelland's newest mystery novel a sagacious gentleman becomes atom-minded, and Hans Stefan Santesson doesn't wholly approve. But we rather suspect that Mr. Santesson likes Mr. Kelland notwithstanding. Indeed, it is just that revealing quality of incisive criticism tempered by an occasional power that makes our critic's views so delightful, and even when you don't agree with him his persuasiveness has a compelling charm.

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moment, that he never really understood his son as the boy turns his head away, frowning, and tight-lipped, in THE WATCHMAKER. Recommended.

News analyst John W. Vandercook, author of "Black Majesty" and other novels, turns to this field again after an absence almost of twenty years. His MURDER IN HAITI (Macmillan, $2.75), features the same detectives who appeared in his earlier novels MURDER IN TRINIDAD and MURDER IN FIJI, reissued by the same publishers in their *Murder Revisited* series.

Bertram Lynch, long-time operative of the British Secret Service and associated, even now, with an office that seems to have unorthodox interests, is hired to protect multi-millionaire Viggo Sand, whom you may or may not identify correctly. Mr. Lynch and the somewhat less forceful Robert Deane have to cope with the reluctance of a man of Sand's stature to admit even the time of the day. He has also to contend with the tendency of other characters to play with guns and knives, as the financier, his guests, and an unusual crew, sail on Sand's super-deluxe yacht for the West Indies. It all adds up to murder, suave, cosmopolitan, and quite understandable.

Jennifer Baird and Lord Philip Clavering suddenly find themselves in London in 1795—bustling, crowded, dirty, flamboyant Regency London—both of them confused, bewildered and haunted by disturbing memories of having known each other before.

And so they had! In the year 1955.

Philip Clavering is even more bewildered than Jennifer as he finds himself in that earlier London with a wife who, up to the night before, had considered him "the most spineless, poor-spirited creature who ever walked." In that strange "other life" he is drinking or eating with men and women whose future and whose secrets he knows better than they can imagine, and is even aware that he is soon to be hunted tirelessly as a suspected murderer.

FEAR IS THE SAME (Morrow, $3.50), is Carter Dickson's first novel in three years. The author, equally well known as John Dickson Carr, needs no introduction to many, many thousands of us here and abroad. Mr. Dickson's Sir Henry Merrivale has been in retirement much too long. He represents, with Dr. Fell, Mr. Dickson Carr's contribution to that gallery of distinguished latter day successors to Sherlock Holmes, that also includes John Creasey's Dr. Palfrey and Michael Innes' Sir John Appleby. Of course read Carter Dickson's "Fear Is the Same."

Hampton Stone's THE STRANGLER WHO WOULDN'T LET GO (Simon and Schuster, $2.75), reports on the newest adventures of Assistant District Attorney Gibson who has a most disturbing tendency to attract violence.

This *was* going to be a holiday from witnesses and sudden death, but Gibby failed to make allowances for the feud between the oystermen and the duckmen that somehow contributed to this case of slightly confused but on the whole genteel murder. I should have said *murders*. Jeremiah X. Gibson's known scepticism, imagination, and tendency to cut corners, complicates life for a killer who found himself "started on murder"—only to realize he couldn't let go.

Another reader's reaction to Clarence Budington Kelland's forty-first novel, DEATH KEEPS A SECRET (Harper's, $2.75), was that the hero couldn't be a scientist in these jet-propelled days—and unfortunately one has to agree. Professor Thomas Alva Edison Gimp is a beautiful piece of characterization, and would be almost credible if he were not required to function against a background of intrigue and violence at White Sands. The publishers assure us that this is "a story that moves with the roaring blaze of a rocket right up to the startling and ingenious climax." In this writer's slightly dissenting opinion "Death Keeps a Secret" is another novel of intrigue and smooth—even if slightly *papier maché*—characterization, set, incongruously, in our atomic-power minded days by an author whose name has meant so much to us for so long.

Don't be frightened off by the blurb that quotes Patricia Wentworth as calling this "really a delightful work, cultured and charming, besides being very exciting." Mary Stewart's first novel, MADAM WILL YOU TALK? (Mill-Morrow, $3.50), is an attractive portrait of a group of likable people suddenly facing violence and betrayal. Credible? Well, perhaps. But definitely pleasant and, to quote Victor Canning, "blessedly readable."

Sax Rohmer, who contributed so much to the folk memory at the root of the average man's distrust of the Oriental, continues to do his bit towards inter-group understanding in SINISTER MADONNA (Gold Medal, 25 cents). Sumuru, whose soul was old when Babylon was young, searches for the Seal of Solomon, possession of which can set the East afire. The Order of Our Lady plays its role in the grim struggle to defeat the plans of a beautiful and evil woman who has come out of the East. Recommended.

Corrupt gangster - controlled Slocum is startled as the Medical Examiner, Dr. Chris Hart, turns out to be a problem. Dr. Hart refuses to fake an autopsy report.

There are ways in which fathers can be persuaded, and the expected effort is made to "persuade" Dr. Hart. But Carol, his beautiful secretary, complicates the plans of this ruthless man in Miriam Borgenicht's DON'T LOOK BACK (Doubleday, $2.75). Recommended.

George Harmon Coxe, past president of the Mystery Writers of America, is, as Erle Stanley Gardner has written, "one of the few authors who have the knack of hitting a fast pace, and keeping it up from chapter to chapter and book to book." This is brought forcibly home to us in his new SUDDENLY A WIDOW (Knopf, $2.75), a mystery in which the ingredients of death are greed and jealousy and hatred—startling greed, understandable jealousy, and truly frightening hatred.

John Harrington *had* been a rather difficult man—and the murderer knew it. Ann Harrington *had* feared and hated him—and the murderer knew that also.

So few people really regretted John Harrington's passing, and none less so than the man who hurried things a bit. But it took some time before the truth was revealed—just as the murderer was about to strike again. Recommended.

The new Whit Masterson novel, BADGE OF EVIL (Dodd Mead, $2.95), describes what happens to Assistant District Attorney Mitchell Holt when he takes too seriously the conclusion of the Attorney's Oath—"I will never reject, from any consideration personal to myself, the cause of the defenseless or oppressed, or delay any man's cause for lucre or malice. So help me God."

Holt's determination to live up to this oath costs him his job, his reputation and almost his life, as he comes closer and closer to a shocking truth. Good, credible characterization. While by no means a classic, "Badge of Evil" has much of the tenseness and story impact that distinguished the author's earlier novels. Recommended.

—Continued from Back Cover

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The Very Latest Perry Mason Hit!

Perry Mason has an ace up his sleeve—a gorgeous red-head! She's the surprise witness he's counting on to save his client from the electric chair. But she DISAPPEARS. Perry can't locate her. But when the trial opens she's *in the courtroom*. SHE'S going to be the star witness FOR the D. A.!

❷ The Case of The
NERVOUS ACCOMPLICE

Mason's beautiful client, Sybil Harlan, is on trial for murder. The District Attorney produces one witness after another—right down to a ballistics expert who says that the fatal bullet came from Sybil's gun! And all Perry offers in her defense is—*a wheelbarrow filled with rusty scrap iron!*

❸ The Case of The
SUN BATHER'S DIARY

Perry gets a frantic phone call—from a woman who says all her clothes and her auto trailer were stolen while she was sunbathing. She offers Perry $1500 to recover them. The investigation leads Mason into a MURDER case. According to the evidence, the killer is either Perry's client . . . *or Perry himself!*

❹ The Case of The
GLAMOROUS GHOST

Perry's client has amnesia. She can't remember a thing that happened on the fateful night her husband was murdered. She can't even recognize her own gun — the MURDER WEAPON!

❺ The Case of The
RESTLESS REDHEAD

Perry Mason's client is the victim of a double frame-up . . . or IS she? The first time she called up Steve Merrill, the police came—and accused her of stealing $40,000 in jewels from Merrill's wife. The SECOND time she called him, the police came again. This time they accused her of MURDERING Merrill!

❻ The Case of The
RUNAWAY CORPSE

Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter which accuses her of planning to poison her husband Ed. (Ed has just died of arsenic poisoning!) Perry searches Ed's office and finds an envelope with six sheets of *blank* paper! Then the police accuse Perry of substituting the blanks for the REAL letter!

—Continued on Inside Cover

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